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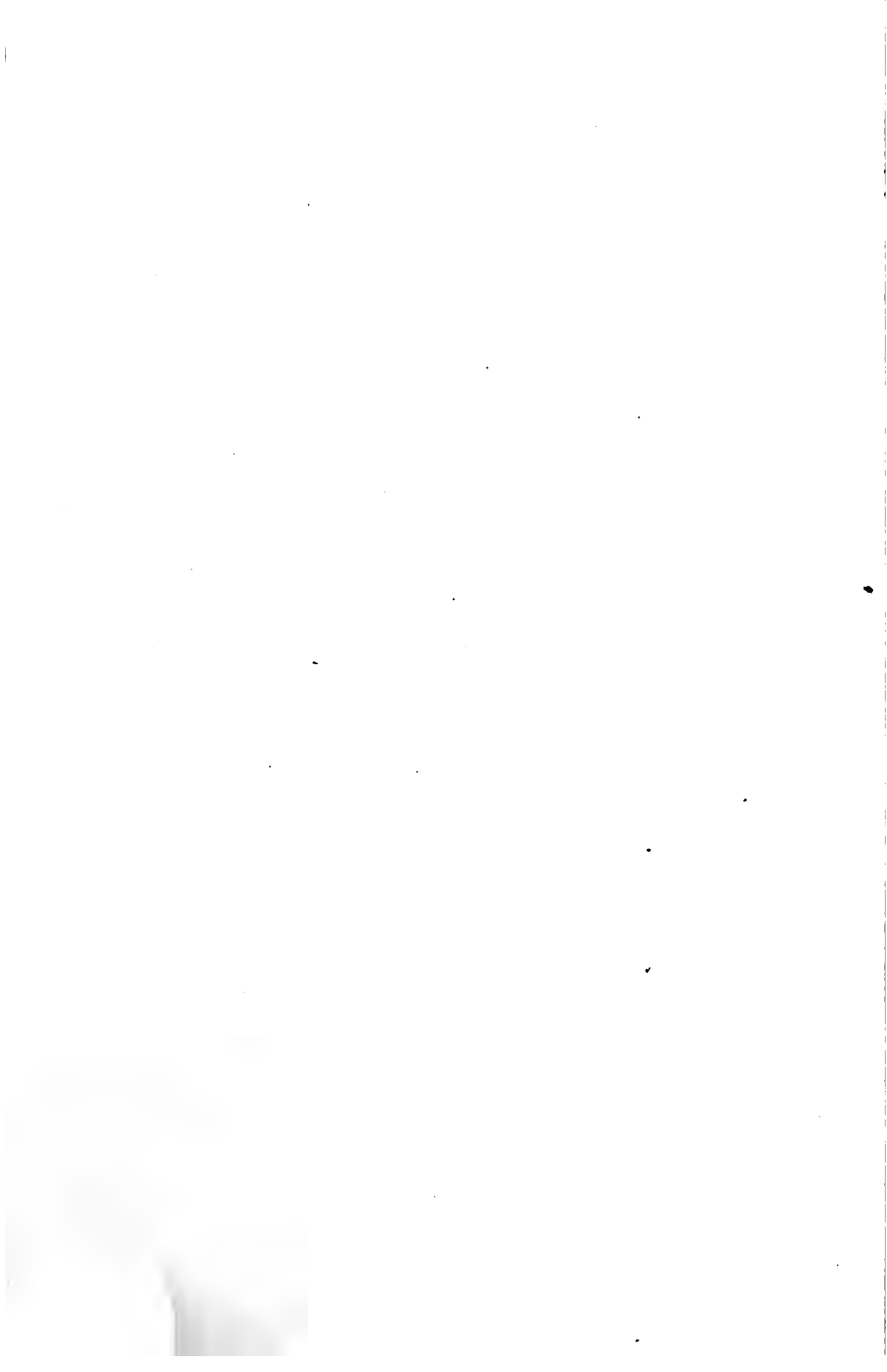
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On Active Service Series.

A HANDFUL OF AUSSEYS



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TO YOU ABANDON

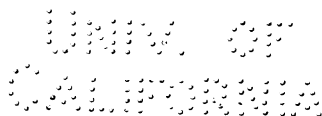


"THAT'S WHAT SHE KEPT ON SAYIN'—'APRES LE GUERRE'"

A HANDFUL OF AUSSEYS

BY C. HAMPTON THORP, A.I.F.

With Illustrations by JAMES F. SCOTT



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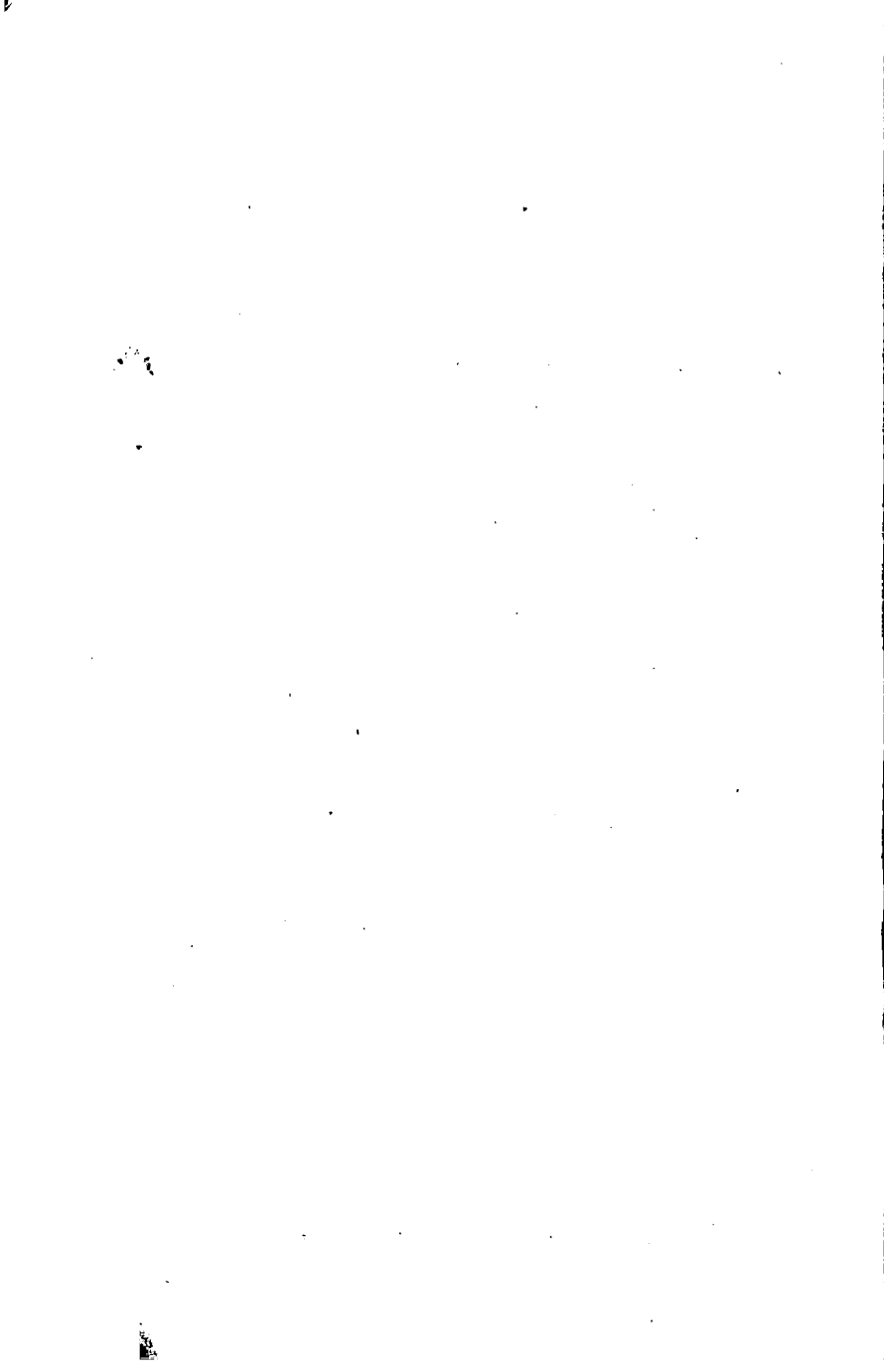
TO THE
MANAGER

CP.

TO
THE MEMORY OF
MY COMRADES
WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES IN
THE CAUSE OF LIBERTY AND JUSTICE
THIS BOOK
IS DEDICATED

C. H. T.

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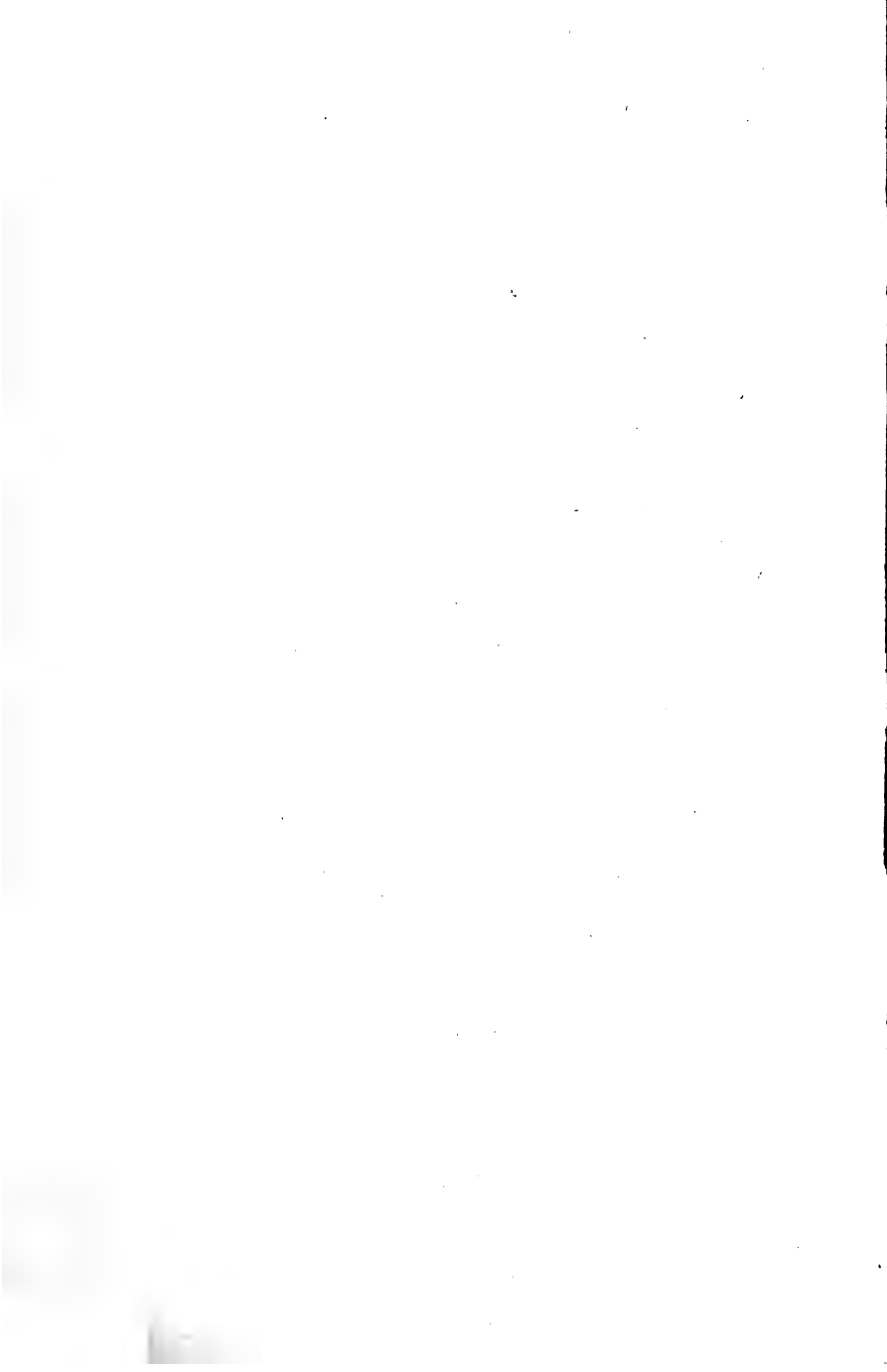
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FOREWORD

BY

GENERAL SIR WILLIAM BIRDWOOD,
G.C.M.G., K.C.B., K.C.S.I., D.S.O.

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE H.Q., B.E.F.,
FRANCE, 5th December 1918.

THE sketches so vividly drawn and described by the author depict the daily life experienced by the Australian Reinforcement from the time he leaves his far-away home until he finally becomes "on draft" and joins his battalion holding part of the line in France.

I feel sure that the book, with its wealth of anecdote, will appeal to many apart from Australians, but especially to those members of the A.I.F. who from force of circumstance were unable during the first year to come forward and take their share in the Great War of Right against Might. Many of those men, volunteering at a time when the love of adventure which had inspired the first contingents had been drowned in the stern realities of what modern war meant, will

recognize their feelings and sensations during the strenuous time that led up to their baptism of fire. In closing this Foreword by wishing *A Handful of Ausseys* all success, I know that I am expressing a hope that will certainly be fulfilled.

W. B. Woodward

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE first fifteen or so chapters of this book were not intended for publication, being merely a record in narrative of principal events during our troop-ship voyage, and during the early training in England. Through minor circumstances Mr. Lane eventually had the MS. read and he was good enough to express a desire for a more lengthy story, which would somewhat individualize the Australian both in England and France—a continuation of the reinforcement's experiences until it should merge itself into the battalion.

In the later chapters I have endeavoured to picture the Aussey as he really is—a lovable, humorous, if somewhat crude product of the great Commonwealth; and, although I am a New Zealander and have a tremendous admiration for my own country and everything connected with it, my soldiering days with the Ausseys have endeared them to me beyond expression—they are fighters and MEN.

In a later volume I hope to deal with various situations an Australian infantryman finds himself in during the year or so following his absorption into the battalion, and will try to picture such characters as Long'n, Dags, Hungry, Snow, Bushey,

and others whose types are so familiar to every Australian on active service.

It may interest readers to know that the complete MS. of this volume was thoughtlessly burnt by a fatigue-party "cleaning up" a room in which it was kept, and that most of the typed copy was seized by individuals of the party who, glancing through it, saw, as they termed it, "dinkum Aussey stuff," and, unaware of its importance and that it was due to reach a publisher the next day, decided to read it in their huts and see what it was all about. The very same afternoon, one of the party went on four days' leave to Suffolk, taking with him twenty-six chapters of the typed script. As there was no duplicate copy, and the original MS. had been destroyed, my mind was not by any means "at ease." I pictured the departed one leaving his "find" in the train, or, bored with reading it, giving it to any stranger. Eventually, after stopping four days over his leave period, the unconsciously-important absentee returned, and with him the typed script.

The majority of chapters in this book were written under unusual conditions—in a hut where thirty noisy Australians were prone to amuse themselves, or in some forbidden recess where discovery by the C.O. meant nothing less than "orderly-room" for being absent from "physical jerks."

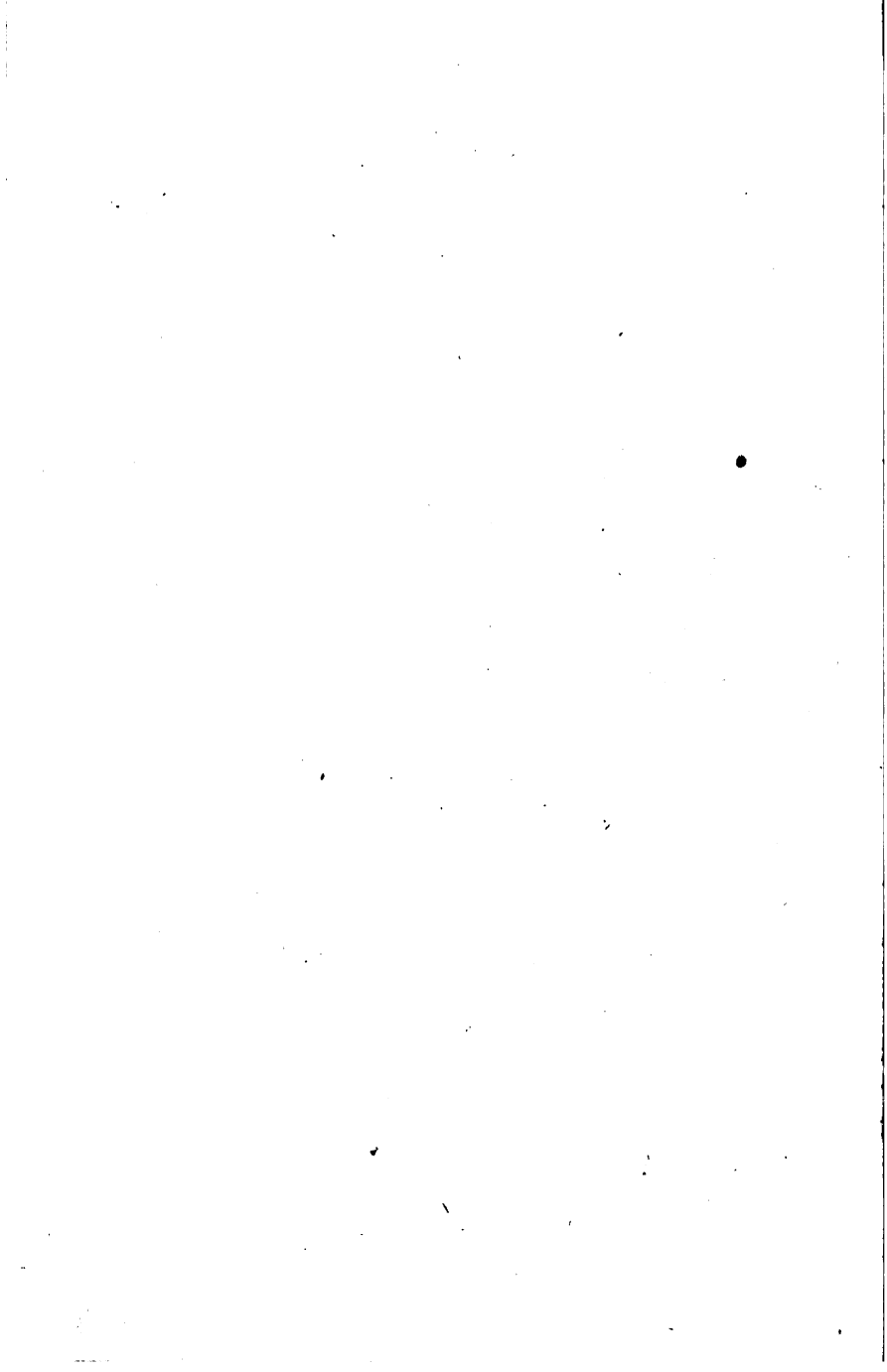
All the characters in this book are purely fictional, and do not in any way refer to any particular Australian I have met.

C. HAMPTON THORP, A.I.F.

20th June 1918.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE deep thanks of the author are tendered to Major Hagan and Lieut. Crampton, A.I.F., and to Messrs. A W. Marchmont and C. J. Parker, for their sustained interest in his work.



TO AUSTRALIA

(By kind permission of the Poet Laureate)

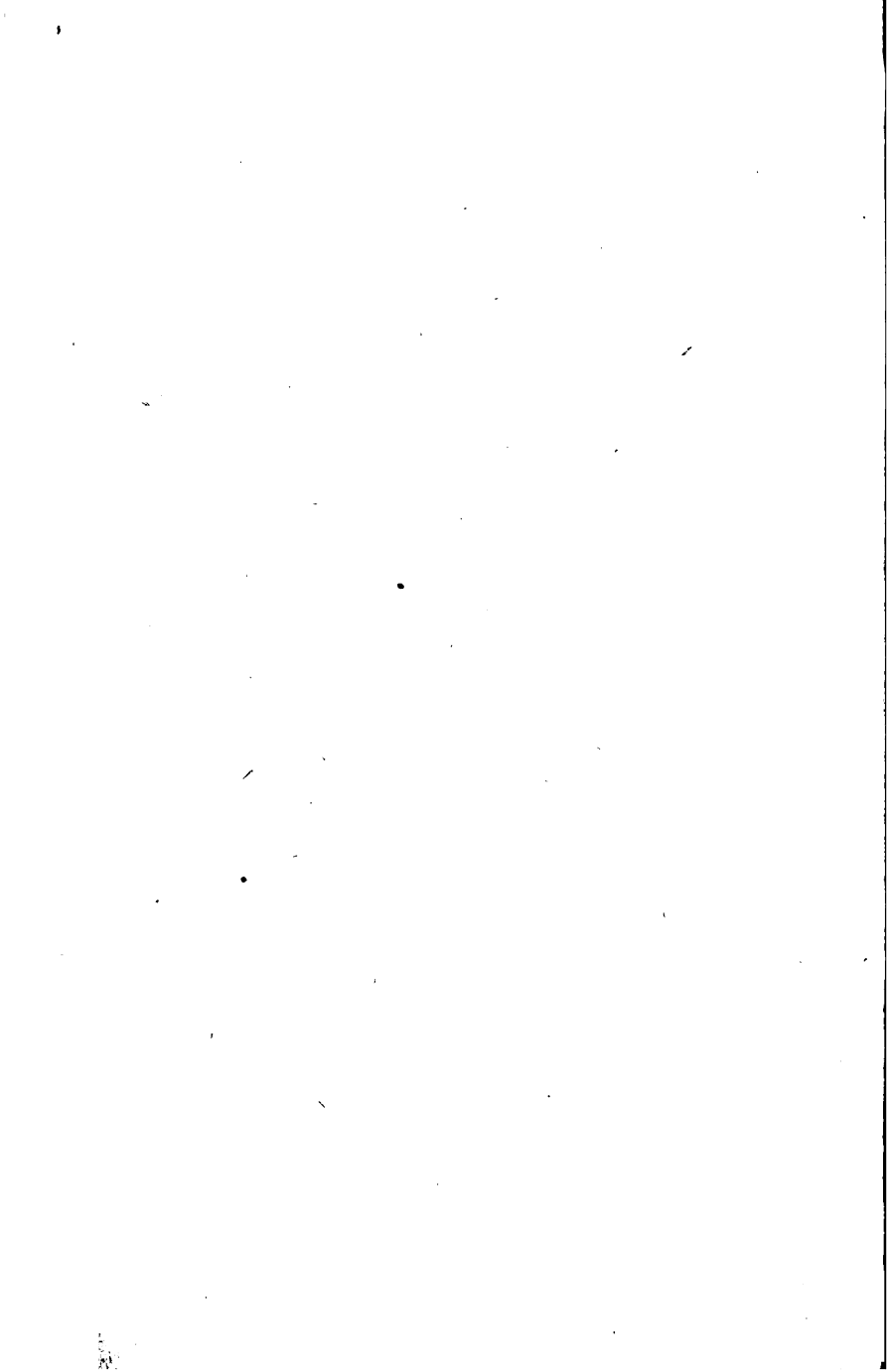
WITH THE WOUNDED AND THE 1914 MEN ON LEAVE
RETURNING HOME, AUTUMN 1918

A LOVING message at Christmastide
Sent round the world to the under-side,
A-sail in the ship that across the foam
Carries the wounded Aussies home ;
Who rallied at War's far-thundering call,
When England stood with her back to the wall,
To fight for Freedom that ne'er shall die
So long as on earth the old flag fly.

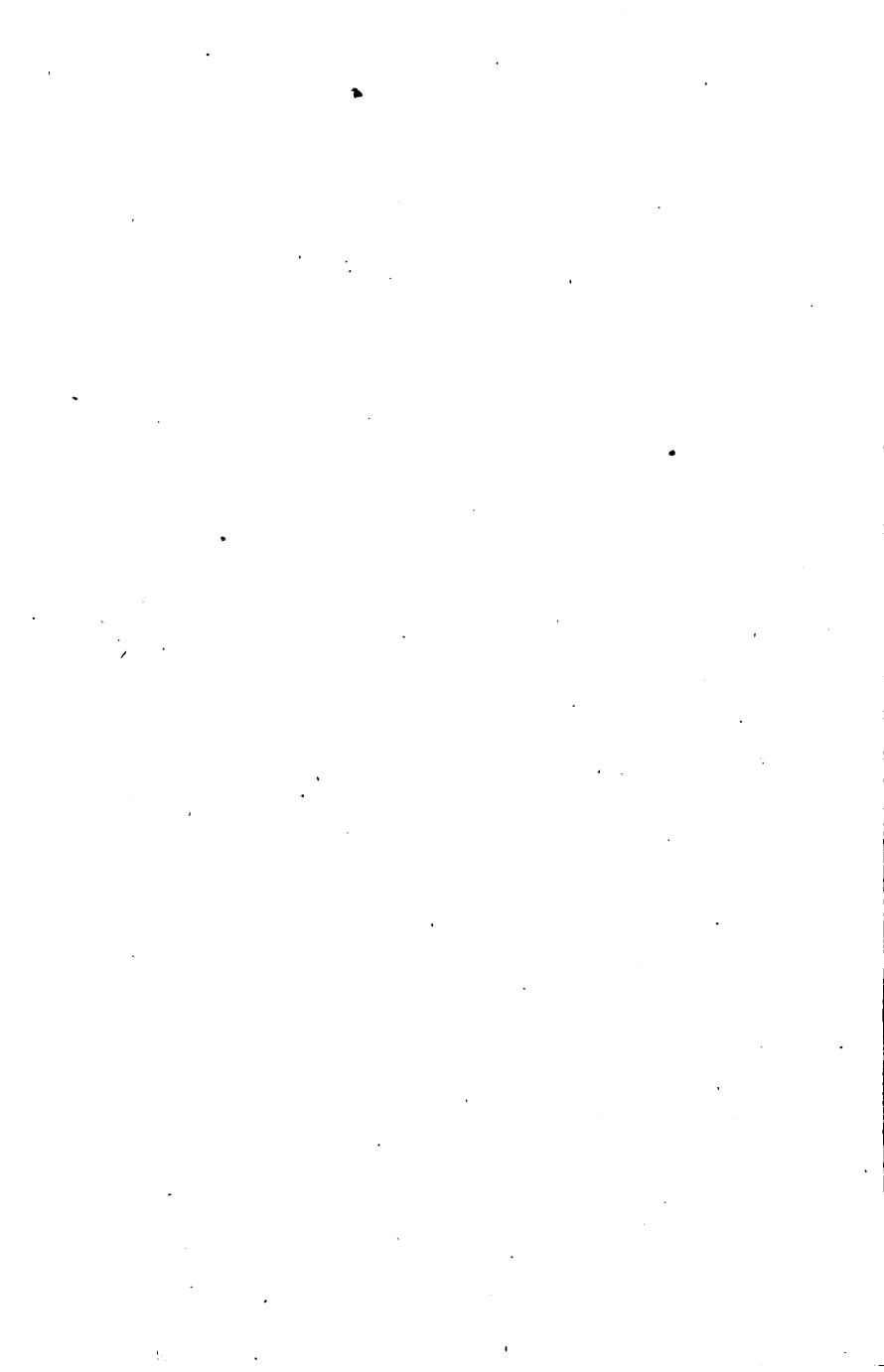
Oh hearts so loving, eager and bold—
Whose praise hath claim to be writ on the sky
In letters of gold, of fire and gold—
Never shall prouder tale be told
Than how ye fought, as the knights of old,
"Against the heathen in Turkye
In Flanders, Artois, and Picardie":¹
But above all triumphs that else ye have won,
This is the goodliest deed ye have done,
To have sealed with blood, in a desperate day,
The love-bond that binds us for ever and aye.

ROBERT BRIDGES

¹ Chaucer, Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*, lines 66 and 86



A HANDFUL OF AUSSEYS



A HANDFUL OF AUSSEYS

CHAPTER I

OUR DEPARTURE

AT last we were to go. Embarkation orders had been received and the officer commanding our reinforcement assured us that, failing death, we would sail in three days' time. There was a certain element of suspicion still in existence among some of the boys, caused, no doubt, by former happenings, but on the whole we felt tolerably certain of a close departure, and all our "sailing issue" had been received, including equipment and sea-kits. The "interior economy" department of our unit felt no suspicion of false rumours. They were at work, day and night, on nominal rolls, allotment sheets, medical history sheets—known in the Service as "D.I." forms—and all the various details of clerkship necessary to the departure of a reinforcement.

Then came the news that we were to be inspected by the District Commandant at Moore Park next day and would have to be ready. So the remainder

of the day was occupied by the unit in doing "march past" stunts, and by the time dismissal had sounded we could keep a tolerably straight line for five yards. Here I divulge a secret: we were, or rather had been, Light Horse until a month or so back, when we volunteered in a body to go away to France as infantry, rather than stay at Menangle doing "sections right" and "stables" until peace was declared.

Shortly after reveille the next morning we were fitting our equipment—no smooth job to the uninitiated—and after breakfast the packing of universal and sea kits was concluded. Once more the unit paraded in full marching order, and after some further practice in "review" and "line" movements we were inspected by the colonel, who made the same stereotyped speech to us as to former units, but we were handed a lollie in the shape of a statement that we were going to France with a strong recommendation that we "should be utilized as a special cavalry unit on the lines of communication." This lollie most of the men spat out, although a few optimists rolled it round their tongues for weeks afterwards.

Then came the farewells to our comrades still remaining with the "neddies," and more touching farewells to the neddies themselves, and we were on the train *en route* for Sydney.

Every one felt in the highest spirits—no more troop drill, horse picket, or "stables by numbers." Thank goodness from now on we would have nothing but *new* experiences; and, to add to our exhilaration, the residents all along the line cheered and

waved, to the accompaniment of much "cock-a-doodle-doing" from the whistle of our locomotive.

Arrived at Sydney station, we were detrained and held up on the platform for two hours, waiting for other reinforcements from farther up the line to arrive.

Eventually we found ourselves in column-of-route on our way to Moore Park. There followed the usual review, and our unit had the unique distinction of being briefly addressed by the general, who made most favourable comments on our appearance and bearing, which further earned a special four-inch par. in the *Sun*. Most gratifying! Following the review, we marched to the Show Ground, made a hasty tea off bully-beef, cheese and biscuits, and were then given leave until 11 p.m., as we were due to march to the troop-ship at two o'clock next morning. Being far-seeing, almost everybody, including our two officers, eventually turned up punctually at a quarter to two o'clock, some exhibiting evidence of a "wild night ashore," but the majority unduly sobered in mind and body by reason of having undergone the bitter experience of final farewells of mother, wife, and sweetheart.

It was after three o'clock when we hoofed it out in column-of-fours, our regimental band awakening the residents along the line of march, and disturbing the eerie silence of the hour before the dawn by selections which included "Here come the married men," "So-long, Letty," and, predominating over every other tune, the appropriate and much favoured item, "When I leave the world behind."

The column numbered nine hundred as we tramped on to Dalgetty's wharf, and here our gallant bandsmen, all home-service men, were given an opportunity to smoke a goodly number of packets of cigarettes which had been thrown to the boys who were "going," but unluckily had fallen among the musicians. Slight remonstrance against "unsportsmanlike" action had no effect, and we completely forgot to give the band three cheers as the transport moved out.

Once on board, each unit was assigned to its own mess and sleeping deck, and the various departments were formed. The systematic organizing of the troops re feeding and sleeping was entered into, the ship's sergeant-major, orderly-room sergeant, and quartermaster-sergeant learning that they could, individually, do more work in one day than they would have previously thought possible in a week.

After a brief period at anchor in the stream, we moved out of the harbour to the accompaniment of sirens and whistles from vessels, trains, and factories. Every one not engaged on executive work managed to perch up on rigging, boats, or any elevated structure, to get one last look at the harbour and city; and, although men smiled, deep down inside they experienced emotions which would not be crushed, no doubt stirred up by the thought of what wife or sweetheart was going through at that moment, and strong men swallowed hard and smiled kindly at one another.

Meanwhile, the newly-appointed S.S.M. and Q.M.S. had arranged the issue of all messing and

OUR DEPARTURE

sleeping gear to the various units, and the appointment of deck-sergeants and mess-orderlies. The appointment of the former was for the vessel, and this applied also to the orderlies should they prove their capabilities. The issue of the few meals was somewhat disorderly, but soon everything ran on oiled wheels, and the daily routine of ship life was commenced.

Rough weather was encountered on the second day, which lasted for three days and nights, during which time most of the men simply lay about—abject heaps of humanity—too sick to protest if others more fortunate happened to walk on them through the rolling of the vessel. Men on guard for each twenty-four hours through this period had a sorry time of it! One finds it difficult to adopt a smart and soldier-like manner when one's "innards" are continually trying to climb up for a bit of sea air!

The first port of call, Port Adelaide, caused some slight interest, for here the entire troops, except those on guard or fatigues, were taken ashore for a route-march. While they were away, some five hundred or more khaki-clad men of South Australia were assigned quarters on the ship, swelling our total to something over one thousand five hundred rank and file.

Leaving Port Adelaide after a stay of less than twenty-four hours, we began to settle down to troop-ship life in real earnest, and daily routine parades, fatigues, and "duties" became stern realities which no fit soldier dare escape. From "physical jerks" before breakfast, until the last

A HANDFUL OF AUSSEYS

lecture or parade before dismissal sounded, everybody was busy, except for the short interludes between meals and parades. Unlike many other troop-ships, our routine allowed little time for lying about from reveille until dismissal. "I want to see the men occupied—keep them busy! It doesn't do for them to find themselves with nothing to do—breeds discontent," was a favourite speech of the colonel's to officers and N.C.O.'s.

CHAPTER II

THE DAILY ROUTINE

SOMETHING of the life aboard a troop-ship for the individual soldier may be estimated by the following routine of bugle-calls and parades :

6 a.m. Reveille. It must be understood that every man of each unit is provided with a hammock and three blankets, which are rolled into a neat bundle and hung, just prior to bed-time, upon hooks overhead above his place at his own mess-table. When reveille sounds, the sergeants of each unit, assisted by the lesser N.C.O.'s, are responsible that their respective units "tumble out," "show a leg," promptly roll and stow hammocks, shave, wash, and get on deck ready to fall in for the physical jerks. These comprise anything from "Arms upward—Stretch" to "Leap-frog."

At 7.15 the bugles sound the dismiss. Doing physical stunts for three-quarters of an hour on deck, with the sea-breeze filling one's lungs and the smell of the sea in one's nostrils, all combine to create quite "some" appetite for breakfast, which on rare occasions may be even quite appetizing.

Usually there was porridge—without sugar—and milk, and either stew, chops, or sausages with bread and butter. For the first week the meat was quite good, but after a period of cold-storage influence it became tasteless, unless by evil mischance there existed an “artificial” taste which was stronger than the smell of the sea. A pair of orderlies for each table did all the chores—brought the grub, washed up and made clean the tables and deck.

The first meal of the day, timed for 7.45 a.m., was generally over by 8.15, and the men were given until 9.15 in which to smoke, yarn, and clean themselves further.

At 9.20 on every available deck space would be found squads or platoons doing squad-drill, musketry, rifle exercises, or listening in an uninterested group to some subaltern or sergeant holding forth on gas attacks, trench warfare, etc. The unobserved spectator would find much quiet humour at one of these lectures. The sub., perhaps among the men known as a “dope,”¹ would from time to time refresh his memory from a minute note-book, and then continue his lecture in a dreary monotone, calculated to soothe into slumber even an enthusiastic listener. The sun’s rays beating down on the men sitting and, wherever possible, lying in a close group around the speaker, would contribute with his voice, and soon the chests of prone men would advertise by steady rise and fall the fact that they were in the arms of the gods.

Some unlucky ones among these chaps would be

¹ A dull, sleepy person—one who has been doped with drugs.

spotted by their officer, and would be rudely awakened by an N.C.O. and the order "Pay attention, you men!" would be issued, when the lecture would go on. Then here and there a cigarette would be unostentatiously lit, and after the consuming of perhaps two or three fags, the offence of smoking without permission would be observed, and the offender summarily rebuked. But further fags would be consumed, more sleep would be enjoyed, and men's thoughts would be many miles away from chlorine gas and gas helmets.

"Stand at ease!" would be blown at 11 a.m., which meant that "Smoke-o" had arrived. Then would the various squads break up, and a rush would be made to the canteen, there to purchase smokes, sweets, or food-stuffs during the golden minutes when the "shop" would be open for business.

From "Carry on" at 11.15 until 12.15 the squads would carry on with the week's syllabus of training, drill, lectures, etc.

Then at 12.30 would sound "Cook-house door," and a three-course dinner would be consumed and more spare time until 2.15 p.m. From this period until 4 p.m. would be occupied by work again, except the "Smoke-o" from 3 to 3.15.

"Tea" would sound at 5 o'clock, when tea, bread, butter and jam, with cheese on special days, would be the fare; and about every second day a stew would be supplied. The men would kill time until "hammock issue" by playing cards, yarning, reading, or lying on the hatches dreaming of home and mother.

At 7 o'clock hammocks would be unrolled and

hung, and by 8.15 p.m. everybody would be either in his hammock or making preparations for that event.

Such was the ordinary, everyday routine on board, which continued with few modifications until the final port was reached.

It being early summer, with every day a shade warmer than the previous one, the men were allowed to convert their dungaree trousers into shorts, and a complete issue of sandshoes having been made from company funds, there was a degree of comfort in the universal attire. To the man of æsthetic tastes, a jarring note intruded itself in the matter of dress by reason of some men—probably in civil life breeders of wheat—wearing cut-off dungarees that ended quite twelve inches below the knees, and which showed frayed edges, from which dangled wisps and threads of the material. This was in sharp contrast to some of the swagger boys, who sported khaki shorts that allowed a liberal view of well-turned thigh muscles browned by exposure to sun and wind.

A break in the daily routine came with each weekend. Punctually every Saturday afternoon at two o'clock, instead of hearing the usual "Dress!" call, there would float to the keen ears of the troops that ever-welcome call: "There's no parade to-day!" and thus would be available an entire afternoon for impromptu sports, secret gambling, or any pastime possible and found desirable by the boys. Usually on these Saturday afternoons a great many of the men would do their week's washing, and soon would be seen long clothes-lines heavily

weighted with numerous wearing apparel, and stretched from stay to stay, each article fluttering and straining with the force of the breeze blowing through it.

A Sports Committee was formed, and each unit would, on subsequent Saturday afternoons, hold elimination contests in the various events to provide the best co-representatives for the final inter-company sports days ahead. A roped and matted ring was constructed on the forward deck hatch for the boxing, which promised to earn the greatest interest over all other sports fixtures.

Then, when each Sunday would come round, every unit would parade its various denominations to the places appointed to them by the C.O. The Church of England's—by far the greatest majority—would be assembled on the fore-deck at 9.30 a.m. for a three-quarter-hour service, presided over by the padre, and the R.C.'s would attend at the sergeants' mess under the jurisdiction of the priest-captain.

Owing to standing orders prohibiting all men except mess-orderlies from going below to the troop-decks between nine o'clock and eleven o'clock each morning, after the various Church services the men would sit and lounge about on their own parade-decks until the daily inspection was over. This function was never looked forward to by anyone except the provost-sergeant, who on such occasions preceded the colonel, captain of the day, orderly officer, ship's sergeant-major, orderly sergeant, and orderly corporal, which party comprised the C.O. and his staff of "duty" officers and N.C.O.'s, whose

business it was to inspect every nook and cranny above and below decks. The ship's captain and chief engineer attended at this daily inspection, and the entire retinue followed the orderly bugler, and the inflated and all-important provost-sergeant, who knew the route to be followed.

The bugler would sound three notes on his bugle as the party would be about to emerge or descend on to fresh territory, and the P.S. would bellow at any man who failed to straighten like a ramrod the moment the cavalcade showed itself on the horizon. As the inspecting party would approach, working units would straighten and stand rigid on the sharp words, "Platoon—'shun!", from the officer or N.C.O. in charge. But the C.O.'s business was to find dirty decks, dirty eating utensils, or fixtures which did not show evidence of hard scrubbing or holystoning. Stray cigarette butts, odd matches—such items were pounced upon and sharp reproof would be meted out to the subaltern responsible for such carelessness on his own bit of deck.

At first, the deck-sergeants' lives were made miserable through these inspections—knives, forks, dishes, etc., which did not reflect the colonel's face clearly, were held up as sufficient evidence to warrant reduction to the ranks. From 10.30 until some minutes past 11 would be the period occupied in inspection, and everyone breathed his relief when it was concluded. Each day for the first week or two, it was an item of interest to learn what N.C.O. was to be reduced as the result of this function. But the colonel got tired of the novelty after a while, and the adjutant was the "big



"IT'S MARVELLOUS 'OW A SPEEDY HIS OLD COP!"

TO THE
LIBRARY OF THE
CONGRESS

Sherang" on many future occasions. On Sundays, after this all-important business was concluded, the men could go below and write, read, or play cards. The afternoon would be spent in such manner also, although it became a common practice to sleep on a hatch or piece of sheltered deck until tea-time.

The stitching on of buttons and work of a similar nature was usually reserved for Sundays, and many a pair of nether-garments, minus a button or two midway through the week, would have the precarious support of safety-pins until that particular day came round. Then would ensue a hunt for the elusive needle, to find which a man would invariably require to rummage through the contents of both his sea-kit and his universal-kit bag before locating it.

"It's marvellous 'ow a needle kin git lorst jus' w'en yer wanta use it," a Billjim would exclaim after a long but successful search.

CHAPTER III

LESSER DETAILS

IN order to equalize the work of fatigues, guards, etc., among the various units, each reinforcement would have its duty day. This meant that it had to supply a guard of 48 men and 6 N.C.O.'s for guard duty, various parties of 20 or more men for cook's fatigue, butcher's fatigue, etc., and generally to absorb its whole strength in doing the work not included in the duties of any permanent detail.

During the first two weeks, the morning and afternoon sick parades were well attended, particularly the earlier one, attendance at which absolved a man from physical jerks. It was common to see from 50 to 120 men waiting at the hospital to be treated, while their mates laboured and strained in the throes of physical drill. But the M.O.'s got wise, and it came as a dull and sickening thud to the "sick" to learn that 90 per cent. of them would do holystoning all next day for malingering. At the following morning's sick parade seven men attended, and it is easy to understand that they were legitimate cases.

Much correspondence was indulged in by the troops. Every letter had to be left open for censoring, and a great pile soon accumulated in the huge mail-bags kept in the ship's library. The two padres did the censoring, at times superintended by the colonel. The latter informed us members of the sergeants' mess that it was astonishing what liars some men were—this statement being made apropos of the censoring of the men's letters home.

Concerts were arranged and held frequently. The scene of operations was the main hatch on the for'ard deck, where a really decent piano, lent by the Australian Y.M.C.A., was installed for each occasion. An electric arc-light gave a plentiful radiance to the proceedings and shone upon many hundreds of bronzed faces grouped *en masse* about the locality. Almost every item was encored—the taste of the assembly inclining to anything of a comic nature. The usual painful moments obtruded themselves, however, when some artist, with the hall-mark of shearer or boundary rider stamped all over him, would sing in an undertone to the pianist the refrain of the song about to be inflicted upon the audience, and after one or two repeats, in sheer desperation the pianist would say, "Right-o! I've got you, Steve," and the comedian, smiling joyfully, would commence in a loud voice many sharps and flats and tones *above* the "commencing" notes struck by the pianist. The latter, manfully keeping back tears of rage and sheer annoyance, would dexterously feel out a suitable scratch accompaniment, or in desperation, finding the "setting"

impossible to accompany, with clenched teeth would lower his hands from the keyboard and glare at the singer's back with murderous eyes.

The following are some stanzas which an enterprising individual composed for one of our concerts. It was a "topical" number, given to the tune of "A Wee Doch an' Doris," and was sung by half a dozen lusty members of one of the other units.

We're in the blooming Army and we're going to the War,
And we belong to units that come from near and far.
We're feeling fit as fiddles, and none of us will quit,
And when we reach the trenches, we intend to do our bit.

We left our camps at daylight with our equipment new,
And all the girls they cheered us at Rammi's by review;
And then into the city we went to have some fun,
We had passes till eleven, but we all got back at one!

We got on board the *Afric* and yelled our last "good-byes,"
And when we left the harbour the tears stood in our eyes.
'Twas fine at first, but quickly we struck the wind and rain,
And we went down to our dinners, but we brought them up again!

We keep our kit and blankets in bundles clean and neat,
We try to clean our faces, and—sometimes do our feet!
We like to have a shower when drilling hours are done,
But when we turn the bally tap, the water will not run.

Our meals are not too dusty since we have been at sea,
Although we like some sugar with porridge and with tea;
But when we clean our tables and think they are all bright,
The Colonel points the dirt out with his tricky little light.

We have a fat policeman who puts us in the clink
If we just ask a question, or give him half a wink,
He quotes King's Regulations—and when it's not too cold
He sleeps upon the life-belts that are lying in the hold.

We've seen some whales and flying fish, great porpoises and shark,

Some other things we've noticed too, when lying in the dark.
If we should see a submarine we know we are secure,
The Naval Guard will blaze away and sink 'em, certain sure!

Our sergeants are a decent crowd, they're white men every one,

And we have much to thank them for when our day's work is done.

They're gentlemen yet comrades, and some have earned a com.,

Which must be theirs if blighter Fritz don't get 'em with a bomb.

But on the whole the concerts were very popular.

Then there were the days of the big swell, when the ship glided over and between great smooth hills of water. This was a period during which the mess-orderlies three times a day risked life and limb when carrying meals from the galley to the mess-deck. Picture a ship rolling until the decks are at quite regular intervals sloping steeply toward port and then to starboard, and at such an angle that no human being could refrain from slithering down into the scuppers unless he gripped a fixture with arms of steel. From the port-side of the aft galley emerges an orderly, both hands holding the edges of a shallow dish almost full to the brim with scalding hot stew. By some miraculous fluke he maintains a most uncertain balance as he cautiously makes for the companion-way leading to his mess-deck. Suddenly he goes sliding, still on his feet, toward the port men's washhouse, holding his dish out and dexterously preventing the stew from

running over the edge. At last he slows down, stops, straightens, and carefully heels over to port as the ship leans quickly to starboard. Then he comes back with a run and brings up sharply against some passing officer, and a small wavelet of stew and grease flops on to the officer's immaculate tunic. But that gentleman is a sport and laughingly proceeds to help the orderly to the steep stairs of his mess-deck.

Here the real trouble commences. Sixteen steps must be negotiated, and no longer is a view of the sea possible, and which formerly served as a guide as to which side the ship was going to lean. With clenched teeth and blanched cheek does the poor orderly begin his descent, choosing a moment when the stairs commence to "lean up" toward him. He gets down six steps and his blood runs cold, because the stairs are tilting up until they reach the perpendicular of a ladder against a house. But ere the tragic moment arrives which will shoot him headlong down to the deck below, his feet mercifully slip on a too-greasy step and he promptly sits down, the dish of stew sailing from him to overturn and bespatter his mate who is laboriously climbing up some steps below for more tea for "54" table. Both orderlies, emitting considerable profanity, smile cheerfully and proceed to clean up the mess, hoping, for their own personal safety, that the galley-man will still have a bit more stew to replace the loss.

Washing accommodation and "showers" were somewhat limited for so large a number of men, and much growling and muttering was the result,

some men, of obviously unclean habits, inwardly joyful at this state of affairs, but outwardly the biggest growlers, and loud in their condemnation of the authorities. These men seldom, if ever, used a shower, but more of them anon. Then the sergeants, who had a minute shower compartment, and not nearly sufficient for sixty-five sergeants, would, at times, find private soldiers using this "conservative" area, despite the fact that a special par. prohibiting privates from so transgressing came out in "Orders" a few days previously. The following dialogue would ensue:

Sergeant to Soldier: "I say! what does this mean? Don't you listen to routine orders? What the devil——!"

Soldier (interrupting somewhat boldly): "We can't get inter our own—there's hundreds of blokes waitin' now."

Sergeant (transfixing the nude figure with his eye): "That's no excuse. Such hide! Out of it quickly, before I shove you in the clink!"¹

Soldier (his temper rising): "What's a bloke ter do if he can't use this place when his own's full and this ain't bein' used?"

Sergeant: "See here: suppose you see no prospect of getting any dinner at your own mess table, would you have the hide to come down to our mess, or would I bowl into the officers' mess if I got no grub at our mess? Same thing exactly. Get out quick, or go in! I'll give you three minutes."

And the N.C.O. departs, loath to be drawn into

¹ Guard-room.

criming the man when circumstances are the responsible factor. As he recedes along the deck, dark mutterings against all non-coms. ooze out from the chinks and cracks of the sergeants' showers.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST FOREIGN PORT OF CALL

THE ship is nearing its first foreign port of call, and rumours are rife as to where this will be. The wireless on the boat-deck buzzes and sparkles, and learned signallers hang around the precincts of the wireless room after dark, trying to read what is singing and buzzing up at the aerials. But not for days does it dawn on these inquisitive mortals that all messages received or sent would be in code!

Eventually, in glorious weather, a trifle hot perhaps, land is sighted, and ere many hours the pilot-boat comes out to assist the ship into port. An hour or so before finally slipping along the narrow channel leading to the docks, all hands are thrown into a mild state of excitement by the presence of large numbers of big sharks which infest the waters of the bay, and which pass so close to the ship, dark fins showing above the surface, that every detail of their exterior can be plainly seen. As the transport nears the docks, further interest is centred in what appears to be a girl of the "flapper" stage, who is observed to be

signalling in truly orthodox manner, using two flags and the semaphore code.

We read her message carefully—it comes along quickly and clearly, with no hesitation—sent by an expert. "Tell all the boys to come to the Y.M.C.A. Hut, opposite the Town Hall, when they get ashore," is what we read, so we get a signaller to send back: "Thanks very much, we will." Meanwhile from rigging and rail other fellows with a knowledge of semaphore are vainly signalling divers messages and inquiries to the fair one, who is sending from the bridge of a steamer alongside the wharf. Presently she repeats her message and then disappears, and is shortly seen to enter a single-seater car, which she herself drives in the direction of the town.

Swarms of almost nude native children are clustered on the wharf to greet us as the ship's great steam-winch winds in the huge "coir" ropes taken ashore from bow and stern. Shrill and minute voices reach us: "Penny, bass," and at this demand a shower of coins rise into the air and fall among trucks, railway track, and coal dust, which are the principal adornments of this part of the docks. Then follows a mad scramble: small forms, with truly wonderful agility, dart hither and thither, small white teeth gleam, and here and there an urchin, less lusty than his fellows, finds himself on his back in the coal dust, his hands no doubt full of pennies, as the result of a first dashing scramble. A full-grown coolie shows up and tries to participate in the general harvest, but deep-throated threats in pure Australian, unmistakable

in their grim meaning, reach his ears as he sends boy after boy flying and grabs the coveted coins still darting from ship to wharf. He is a philosopher, this coolie, and stolidly withdraws from the somewhat unequal fray. Besides, he is by now familiar with the ways of the Australian soldier, having seen many other ships unload and reload.

Our unit has been given the task of supplying pickets for the day—and half the night—and is waiting on our drill-deck, a neatly-clad, alert body of men. All hands except those on duty are to go ashore, and we form up on the wharf in close column-of-platoons and presently hear: "Advance in column-of-fours from the right!" It is a mile and a half to the Town Hall, where we are to be briefly addressed before being dismissed, but the picket detaches itself and forms up at the police barracks, where it is divided into shifts and allotted its duties.

To the average soldier amongst us, the town is absorbingly attractive. The powerful rickshaw-boys in their picturesque head-dress secure first notice, and next in point of interest come the swarms of locally-recruited Tommies that are to be seen everywhere. They are clad in light khaki shirts and shorts, with the inevitable helmet, and visions of German East Africa and its dreaded malaria rise to one's mind. Soon the main streets of the town seem to be literally swarming with soldiers, Australian and local, and everywhere one sees numerous rickshaws, each carrying up to three burly Australians, gliding along behind their powerful human steeds.

To a few of us older soldiers the sight merely recalls old times, and we tell of the many adventures which befell us when we were here on various occasions during the War in 1900. Also we are reminded to warn our comrades that any price quoted by a native is quite 80 per cent. more than he would usually charge, and with this useful hint we seek the Y.M.C.A. Hut, there to consume each four boiled eggs, bread, butter, and several cups of tea, for which we pay the magnificent sum of 1s. 2d. per head. Soon the shops know us, and cigarettes, photographic supplies, and all manner of things change ownership. All kinds of restaurants and cafés are explored and freely commented upon later, and night arrives. Then the "Marine Parade" comes in for much patronage, and the enclosed surfing area affords delight to the men who have sorely missed Bondi and Coogee.

By 10.15 p.m. almost the full muster of troops is wending its way back to the ship, loaded up with parcels. The majority use the free double-decker trains, supplied for the occasion by the municipality, while others are run down to the ship in the ubiquitous rickshaw. It was a usual thing to see two or three rickshaws, each with its load of Australians, moving along one behind the other, at a pace equal to ten miles per hour. Comments and criticism re the respective "steeds" would be shouted:

"This colt 'll do us!"

"Ours once belonged to M'Mahon's in Sydney!"

"This one's cast a shoe from his off hind-leg!"

Such was the type of speech which happy Australians hurled at each other ; and meanwhile the brawny natives, horns shining in the gas-light, would ever run on, their breaths making loud sound from the strongest lungs in the world.

CHAPTER V

PADDY, THE DOG

AFTER a stay of two days, the ship moved out and headed south, and the daily routine was recommenced. I might here mention an incident that ended in a decided disappointment which manifested itself throughout the entire rank and file, and which culminated, as the ship put to sea once again.

At Menangle Light Horse Camp there strayed into the lines one fine day a natty, sharp-eyed, and clean-limbed fox-terrier dog. His greeting of every one portrayed distinct friendliness. With body which wriggled and stump of tail in convulsions, he would put his head on one side and literally smile at you, his wary eyes containing the most knowing expression possible to imagine. We promptly named him Paddy, and introduced him to the chef of the sergeants' mess, who loved all animals. Paddy never grovelled; instead, he would boldly and seriously assail anyone who, in his opinion, acted toward him in any but a sportsmanlike manner. Nobody put him on the train at Menangle, and he wasn't seen; but he was with us when we marched

aboard the transport on that first morning of "active service."

Interfering ship's officers and lesser satellites put Paddy ashore time after time, only to find him back on deck and smiling up at the men among whose legs he threaded his way as the last ropes were cast off. Paddy established himself as a distinct favourite before many days had passed, though it must be admitted that he suffered horribly from sea-sickness during the first rough weather, and must have thought that it was indeed a strange and horrible world he had, by his cunning and devotion to the men, landed into. But his sea-legs were grown before most of the men's and he soon learnt the run of the ship, and learnt also how to walk up and down the steepest companion-way while the ship rolled in the trough of the mighty ocean swell.

Paddy hadn't been more than a week on board before we all noticed his strong aversion to the ship's sailors. Men possessing practically no sense of humour at all simply had to sit down and laugh, the tears running from their eyes and their sides aching, as they would behold Paddy, asleep on a hatch with one eye open, suddenly perceive a sailor looming up—perhaps about to pass the hatch on his way aft. Instantly would arise from Paddy's throat uncanny yet dog-like rumblings, and when the unsuspecting sailor would be in the act of hurrying past the hatch, there would spring out at him, stiff-legged and fearsome, a fox-terrier dog, lips drawn back, the hair on the back of his neck standing upright, and he, himself, snarling in a most terrifying manner. The sailor, wholly taken aback, would jump sideways

and then recover himself, while all around him khaki-clad men would be doubled up with mirth and appreciation.

This peculiar happening never failed on any occasion when a sailor passed close to Paddy's choice hatch for slumber purposes. We couldn't account for it at all, and the dog showed an almost human intelligence in his recognition of anyone not wearing khaki. We eventually put it down to some weird influence which filled him with rage at seeing men unpatriotic enough to be wearing mufti. And never in any single instance was he observed to treat a soldier with such unflattering attentions.

At Point Adelaide Paddy was put ashore at least six times ; but in the grey of the early dawn, as the ship slipped away from the wharf, there he was on the fore-deck, wagging his stump of a tail and evidencing his good-morning greetings to all and sundry who were in khaki. By the time we reached the first foreign port, our dog mascot had earned the universal love and admiration of every one of the fifteen hundred troops on board. His attentions to the sailors became more marked and attracted the captain's strong disapproval. " He'll bite some one yet—he simply must be put ashore here," we overheard the skipper remark to the colonel, as we were entering the foreign port.

As usual, Paddy was among the first ashore when we made fast, and he proudly marched and trotted ahead of the leading four of the column going up town. The second night, when the last trams were filling opposite the Town Hall, Paddy was scouting round on the outskirts of the few groups of

Australians yet to find seating accommodation, when he was spotted by one of his many admirers already in a tram. This man, with a few mates, left his seat and retrieved the canine adventurer into the now moving tram. But of all the unlucky happenings! The colonel, standing off in the shadows, had observed the incident. He signalled the driver to stop, called some resident military police, and ordered Paddy to be placed under close arrest until the ship should have sailed. This was forthwith done, and Cornstalks—New South Welshmen—and Crow-eaters—South Australians—eyed him and the M.P.'s with impotent fury and silent tongue. But when the tram again moved off, without Paddy, he would have felt well avenged had he been able to hear and understand the utterances of these his pals and comrades. "And he is wearing my identity-disc, with his name, unit, and the ship on it," said one man tersely and resignedly. Everybody loved Paddy and we missed him as never was dog missed before, during the long hot days which followed our departure from our first foreign port of call. May he continue to earn the devotion of all men with whom he comes in contact, and I doubt not but what his days will be the best of "dog days."

CHAPTER VI

A BURIAL, SUNSETS, AND GAMBLING

OUR second foreign port of call was reached two days later, and the vessel anchored in the bay, within half a mile of the shipping at the wharves. No one, with the exception of the colonel and a few officers, was permitted to go ashore, and for the twenty-four hours of our stay we had to content ourselves with gazing at the rugged shore scenery, and buying fruit, feathers, etc., from the native traders who came out to the ship in their canoes and boats. It was freely stated that the colonel's refusal of shore-leave was the result of previous reinforcements' "playing up" when they reached terra-firma. So, we were not sorry when the old packet once more turned her bows to the ocean, and it was learnt that we would not touch at any port for a week or ten days.

Then the weather became noticeably warmer, and the men clad themselves in the lightest possible covering permitted.

A tragedy occurred before many more days had passed. One poor chap met with an accident which

resulted in his death, and the burial at sea which followed was one of the most impressive scenes of the entire voyage. The unit to which this soldier belonged was drawn up in two lines on the boat-deck, facing inwards, through which the cortège passed until it reached the boat-deck landing-stage. Here the firing-party was situated, with the buglers standing at the "ready." Almost all of the officers, including the ship's officers, were gathered to pay a last respect to their dead comrade. The body, sewn in canvas and weighted with lead at the feet, was placed on the deck and covered with the Union Jack.

Then began that most solemn of all services—the burial service at sea—and at the appointed moment the engines stopped and the body was committed to the deep, and many a man shuddered as the sound of a dull splash reached his ears. Then the rifles of the firing-party, as one rifle, pointed to the sky and three volleys were fired, between each of which rang out the opening notes of the "Last Post." The wailing and long-drawn notes were the signal for every unit in the ship to be brought to attention, and when the call had concluded the units resumed their former work, and many a youngster, not long in his teens, realized for the first time something of the sudden and mysterious tragedy of death.

In a few days the heat became so intense that it was a positive ordeal to go below, where very little ventilation was available. At night numbers of the men brought their hammocks on deck, and sleep with a certain amount of comfort was enjoyed.

With the first day or two of tropical weather, awnings had been erected over all the drill-decks, and the sun's fierce rays caused little inconvenience. Even with the arrival of the hot weather, there were some men who still shunned the luxury of the showers—"semi-annual washers" we christened them. Palpable instances of this kind were, by permission of the colonel, forcibly carried to the shower-baths, and strong hands held them under while others soaped and scrubbed them until their skins showed red. The men, all except the victims, took the greatest delight in this new form of sport, and very soon it was impossible to find any soldier who had a dirty neck or who emitted an offensive odour of stale perspiration.

Another feature of the hot weather was the rescinding of parades on Wednesday afternoons, which were devoted to the carrying out of sports programmes. Some very interesting boxing was staged, and the finals of the various classes were witnessed by several hundreds of men who perched on every available foot of space which commanded a view of the ring.

To a lover of Nature, the tropical sunrises and sunsets afforded unspeakable delight. Shortly after reveille, a red glow would diffuse the eastern sky, to be followed by the most wondrous rainbow-tints which spread and touched the varied and weird cloud formations, and with the gradual rising of the sun the scene would be one which no artist could ever reproduce on canvas. The sunsets were equally gorgeous, and even the most stolid "cockey"¹

¹ Small farmer.

or "bullocky" amongst the troops would stand gazing at the spectacle in silent admiration.

Then the tropical nights! It was unhallowed joy to sit up on a pile of rafts on the sergeants' side of the boat-deck and just watch the ocean, smooth as any pond, with its undefined expanse of silver water which reflected the great round moon and the lights from the ship's port-holes. A faint breeze, smooth as the finest silk against one's cheeks, would intensify the glories of the night, and one's thoughts would drift—well, naturally to those beings one loved best on earth. And ever and on the good ship would glide, steady as a house, with the silvery water falling in gentle and regular cascades from her knife-like bows. Men would exchange confidences about themselves and their homes, their wives and sweethearts; it was really awesome how these tropic nights exerted this influence on all and sundry.

Gambling among soldiers was deemed a crime, and standing orders prohibited the practice and threatened dire punishment should anyone be caught. Nevertheless, hundreds of pounds changed hands among the men during the first week or two. Two-up was the most favoured game, although banker, poker, and crown and anchor all had their supporters. In dark corners below decks, behind boats and rafts on the poop-deck—anywhere where the official eye would be least likely to wander—did the various "schools" forgather. One 'school,' quite the strongest and best-financed of them all, had its paid scouts employed day and night, to give timely warning of the approach of

anyone likely to stir up strife. The provost-sergeant's efforts to quell the practice proved of no avail. He couldn't be everywhere at once, and his subordinates, themselves speculators of no mean order, would sit in and take a hand or "set" a bet when they were supposed to be watching for evidence of the illegal pastime. But the provost staff never went near the officers' quarters. Alas, the speculative inclination did not confine itself only to the rank and file!

CHAPTER VII

COALING

IN a former chapter, mention was made of daily sick parades on board. From time to time, when "criming malingerers" had lost itself in obscurity, the morning sick parades would once more become popular, and lucky was the soldier who could exhibit a genuine limp or a torn finger as an excuse for an avoidance of the much maligned physical jerks. Then the doctors would wake up again, and next day's orderly-room would know many new visitors.

When the established habits and methods of the hospital towards patients became thoroughly familiar to all and sundry of the rank and file, these customs were unvarnishingly interpreted on the various mess-decks to the following orthodox rules: patient complaining of internal troubles, weakness, or pains, whether in the chest, abdomen, or head, a No. 9, or a dose of white-house. Those complaining of exterior disorders, from a dislocation to an enlarged gland, swabbing part with iodine. In due course one of the medicos earned the unique title of the "Iodine King."

Amidst the hottest weather yet experienced, we steamed into our next port of call, the outlying lands of which were thickly covered with a profusion of tropical bush, palms, and fruit-bearing trees. Riding at anchor well inside the harbour was observed a large collection of transports and warships, which on closer approach numbered fourteen, two of which were fighting-ships. One of these turned out to be a vessel made famous by its splendid work at the naval battle of the Falkland Islands some months previously. Excitement ran rife among our troops at sight of such a convoy. Why, one's mates and "cobbers"¹ of previous days would be on such and such a vessel, and speculation was freely made as to what would happen: would we all depart together, or what? We were assigned our particular location in the harbour wherein to drop anchor, close to two other transports and a passenger liner. Cheers from hundreds of fellow-countrymen lining the rails and upon the rigging of the adjacent troopers greeted us, and the inquiry: "When can we get ashore?" was audible on all sides.

The town itself, a mile away, did not interest us, as little of it could be seen, owing to distance; but beyond it rose many steep hills, carpeted with what looked to be orchards and groves of tropical fruit trees. It was soon made known from headquarters that no shore leave would be granted until the ship had been coaled, and as labour at this port was scarce, the various units would be asked to do the coaling. "Then," said the colonel, "I will allow each unit to have a day ashore." So we sergeants,

¹ Chums.

at the instance of our respective O.C.'s, set about the dividing of our units into working parties and shifts. It was late in the afternoon before the collier came alongside.

Meanwhile, the first shifts had clad themselves in the oldest shorts or trousers they could find. Shirts and singlets were ignored, and semi-nude men took up the positions detailed to them by the coaling overseer. Into the different holds of the collier, on the coaling-decks of the transport, and down into the bunkers, various squads prepared for action, and soon coaling in real earnest was in progress. The shifts first to come off duty presented a ludicrous and, at first, a startling appearance as they filed to their respective showers for a bath. Where, formerly, well-stripped men with snowy-white bodies and arms went up to coal, on their return you would have sworn that they had, by some mystic influence, been turned into African blacks. Not the smallest pin's head of white could be seen: every bit of exterior surface was coated and recoated with fine coal-dust. It took that first shift and all subsequent ones quite an hour to remove, under salt-water showers, most of the traces of their recent calling.

All night the different shifts were at it, and the only periods when coaling was suspended during the next sixty hours was from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day, when the intense and blistering heat made it a menace to human lives were the work to be continued. In spite of the inconveniences which the job entailed, jokes were rife, and many a man can testify to being smeared liberally by some off-coming

"coolie" just after he had painfully removed the black grains acquired during his term of shovelling. From officers down to the buglers, every one took a hand, and lucky indeed were the squads which were allotted the coaling-decks instead of going down into the bowels of the collier, where a continuous cloud of coal-dust darkened the air and was inhaled by the men with every indraw of breath. But the parties told off for trimming in the ship's bunkers fared the worst. They had to work, shovelling and levelling, down in the darkest of holes and passages, sometimes with not sufficient room to straighten their backs, and all the time would come tumbling and sliding down to them the never-ceasing contents of the coal-baskets. A great sigh of relief must have been executed by all hands when the last of the coal had been safely stowed in bunkers and hold.

The thermometer stood at 121° in the shade when the first units to go ashore were drawn up in readiness on the boat-deck. It being compulsory to wear correct issue uniform, the men simply ran to water under their heavy woollen tunics, and more than one man fainted before we loaded into the barges which were to carry us ashore. I am positive that no man who experienced shore leave from our ship on that occasion will ever forget what we had to go through in order to reach terra firma. By some mismanagement, the units had to wait, in their heavy uniforms, for from two to three hours, until the barges came alongside, and during that period the men were packed in a close mass on the boat-deck, with no chance of movement, while the

sun struck through the very awnings and showed its fierceness by the perspiration-soaked tunics and breeches everywhere in evidence. At last we gasped our way down on board the barges, and here the sun got at us properly. But our troubles were dispelled immediately we got ashore, where a warning was issued that assembly would take place at 4.30 p.m., which gave us six hours in which to explore the delights of the town.

Blacks of both sexes were everywhere. Most of them were sellers of fruit, curios, and all manner of things, and we were accosted on all sides by demands to buy. But the boys were wise, and decided to see the town and what it had to offer.

The town itself was fairly extensive, the houses being built of stone and almost all occupied by the native element. Only the smallest handful of white people resided here, for this place was known far and wide as the "white man's grave." There were a great many shops, nearly all the property of natives, and here and there were markets—great, long buildings, in each of which hundreds of native women had stalls for the display and disposal of fruit, bead and cloth work, and varied and weird articles of trade and commerce. The presence of so many foreign troops in the town caused no undue excitement to the populace, who by now had become used to the "Ostalion"—many other transports having preceded our ships *en route* to England.

Each of our fellows wore his haversack suspended from the shoulder, in which had been placed four Army biscuits, as well as his water-bottle, filled with "warm" water. This was meant by the

executive to constitute the soldier's lunch, while ashore ; but almost everybody gave his biscuits to the native urchins, who lost no time in getting outside the unusual repast. Also, water-bottles were emptied on the ground, for who is there who could relish warm water as a thirst-quencher when there was native " lemonade " to be had, cool from its imprisonment in stone and earthenware jars ? Ere long the haversacks bulged with an assortment of native fruits,—plantains, papaws, and oranges,—native-wrought curios, cigarettes, and other truck dear to the mind of the exploring Tommy.

What was apparently a curious and fascinating spectacle to the boys was unearthed some time after lunch. Through a gully at one end of the town was a running stream of water, and in places this creek ran over long, smooth slabs of stone. Here were assembled quite fifty or more native girls and women, doing the family washing. A big majority of the fair sex wore little if any clothes—at most a small, high-coloured cloth would be wound round the hips, and " Psyche at the Well " was represented in the many attitudes necessary to the cleansing of the bright-coloured garments. The established custom was to soak and freely soap the article to be cleaned, and then toss it on to a big flat stone, after which a wooden implement like a canoe paddle would be seized and the apparel would be slammed severely with it many times. It would then be tossed back into the water, and another garment would be soaped. Numbers of our fellows possessing cameras intruded themselves upon the sanctity of this part of the gully, and many were

the attempts made to secure a close-hand snapshot. Bribes would be offered some dusky maiden to pose, and shillings and half-crowns would be exhibited. In some cases these baits proved too strong, and "click! click!" went the shutters of Kodak and Ansco as the mercenary Eve would straighten and walk over to receive the proffered money. At other spots along the creek the girls could not be tempted to reveal their charms—to pose in the "altogether," and as they were all working with bent back full-length photos were impossible, and in many instances the subjects thought that movement would defeat the photographer, and they would sway and swing their hips as a preventative remedy. In no instance was effort made to flee from the soldiers, although some of the boys were freely soused and splashed with soapy water on account of venturing too close.

Some really good photos of the main streets were obtained, showing the various types of "black" which thronged the highways. A native funeral; a narrow-gauge railway locomotive and train; natives carrying huge loads on their heads—all these made interesting pictures. And here and there one would see an Australian and a native girl, arms round each other, posing for the camera of some comrade, perhaps in the main street—the girl having been bribed with a shilling to participate. "Give me hick-penny and you draw me!" some black imp of the streets would, with surprising precociousness, accost a soldier having a camera.

By 4.30 p.m. the troops would be assembled again on the wharf, and would return to the transport, not

sorry to get away from a town which harboured billions of malaria and yellow-fever germs and from which, at every corner, protruded a gabbling mass of female traders lying in wait to filch money from the pockets of the foreign boys. Few of us were there whose heads were not throbbing with the heat and the effect of native drinks, as we scrambled up the companion-way of our ship, our arms full of merchandise, with the definite object of turning in after a very strenuous day, the one native word learnt by the troops ashore still ringing in our ears.

CHAPTER VIII

PETS, CONVOYS, AND DEFENCE SCHEMES

AFTER a stay of four days, the hour arrived when we were to get on the move again. To the intense satisfaction of everybody, it was learnt that our ship would be part of a convoy, made up of a number of the other transports at present in the harbour, and we would be guarded by an auxiliary cruiser. Our own particular ship was to be flagship of the "troopers," and soon the various vessels got under way. Ours was last to leave, and ere long the ships had ranged themselves in two lines, four to eight hundred yards separating the vessels, while the speedy-looking auxiliary, an ex-P. & O. liner, her long grey guns poking out in a menacing manner, took up her position on the left front of the convoy. It was a good sight to see these big steamers—all forging ahead and keeping perfect position, and all hurrying to the War the many thousands of Australia's sons who had chosen to fight "for God, for King and for Country"—this quotation is borrowed from note-paper by kind permission of the Y.M.C.A.

It is remarkable how circumstances will affect the

lives of all living things. We had on board, besides our cargo of humanity, a galah parrot and a kitten, both the property of the ship's captain. Before many days out from Sydney, one of our boys had engraved on a new identity-disc the following text :

I am NELLY. I belong to the Captain of the "Afric."

and had suspended the "dead meat ticket" from the kitten's neck by means of a neat little leather collar, so that every one on board soon became acquainted with the particulars concerning Nelly's name and her owner. The mere fact of Her Highness sporting an identity-disc was sufficient warrant for a far greater amount of notice from all hands than would have been the case had she worn no such adornment. She soon became some kitten, and learnt to come out from the skipper's cabin regularly when the last dismissal sounded, in order to have a romp and a play with the sergeants, whose recreation-deck adjoined the ship's officers' quarters. Nelly learnt very quickly how to coquette with her huge playmates, and the undisputed roguery which shone from her eyes as some large sergeant would strive vainly to reach her—herself just out of reach under a boat or fixture—was creative of much laughter. Sometimes she would slither up the rigging and look down, inviting pursuit, which, if commenced, would immediately be the signal for a more elevated "possi" for Mademoiselle.

The parrot was the limit ! He had been on the ship for two years, and by very frequent association

with lubricating oil, grease, and coal-dust when exploring the engine-room and stoke-hole, he looked the filthiest and most unkempt bird in existence. But he was a sailor, every inch of him, and rain, storm, or sunshine found him perched up on stays, boats, davits, or any place from which he could scream down his simulated anger to all and sundry. At the invitation of an extended finger, he would climb down and perch thereon until he should be able to explore fully the person of the individual. His delight at finding brass buttons, numerals, or watches knew no bounds, and he would spend long periods trying to dislodge these interesting curios. Quickly he learnt how to withdraw the pins which kept the numerals in position, and many a pin was later found to be missing from some Billjim's "AUSTRALIA" as the result of Jacky's previous attentions. It was soon noticed that the galah was never seen on the bridge unless it happened to be noon, when the skipper would be up there with his officers taking the sun, or else during any watch the old man might take, and always when we were coming into or going out of port.

We learnt that this had become a habit with Jacky, who invariably stood the full watch with his master. His tireless attempts to ring the bell on the bridge were most amusing. The short bell-rope dangled within a foot of the aft railing of the bridge where Jacky would hang on with his spiked toes, and he would seize the end of the rope in his strong, curved beak, and would move his feet along the rail until his body and the rope formed a continuous alignment. Then he would exert

his body and neck-muscles and strive honestly to create contact between the knob and the bell-metal. Owing to Jacky's puny strength, this was impossible; nevertheless, he would continue his efforts until forced to relinquish the job by sheer physical exhaustion. This practice he must have thought equivalent to the men's physical jerks; but it must be confessed that the bird was easily the greatest tryer. It is safe to say that, owing to circumstances, the paths of that bird and that kitten were strewn with roses, instead of thorns, which, under any ordinary circumstances, would probably have been the case.

Two days out from our last port we were picked up by the famous warship of Falkland Islands renown. This grim-looking cruiser took up her position many hundreds of yards in front of our leading ships, and the convoy steamed on and ever on. Then came orders that meant the switching off at "Retreat!" of all lights which would throw a gleam out over the water, and the discontinuance of the practice of striking matches or smoking on the various decks. This, at first, caused marked inconvenience, but everybody understood that we were entering the danger zone, and that the safety of the troops must be considered. The only lights allowed on the various troop-decks were the police-lights—screened and set so that they lit the interior dimly yet threw no reflection out from the ports. The dead-lights—iron port screens—were dropped in the officers' and sergeants' respective messes, so that no glimmer could be seen from the exterior; and when night came no

illumination on any ship was visible, and the great black shapes, the nearest ones but indistinctly seen, steamed on, the smoke from their funnels leaving long, thin trails which drew away thinner and thinner until they lost themselves in the farthest darkness.

During the day-time, signal flags would frequently break-out on the signal halyards of the warship, to be answered by first one transport and then another. What was passing between them we had no way of knowing. At times the warship would turn off her course and bear away at full speed to some point on the flank, all her guns swung out and the gun-crews at their stations. Watching interestedly, one would later discern, away on the horizon, some lonely-looking steamer, ploughing her weary way toward her destination, the fighting-ship standing by until any possible danger from the foreigner should have passed. Sometimes such a vessel would be stopped and her papers examined by our vigilant scout. This active interrogation of all other vessels reminded us of a hen jealously guarding her first brood of chicks.

Then we were frequently practised in boat, fire, and submarine-alarm drill. A system of signals was arranged, which would be the warning for every one to fly to his allotted post. Four short blasts on the ship's whistle meant "Submarine," when all hands would secure and fit on their life-belts before swarming to their stations. Five blasts meant "Fire," and no life-belts to be worn. Each section was appointed to a specified station on deck, adjacent to the particular boat or raft allotted to that section, and every unit would stand

to attention, or else lie prone on the deck, awaiting further orders from the skipper on the bridge. Some ten minutes or so after stations had been occupied, the bugles would sound the "Dismissal." These alarms never sounded during parade hours, unless it happened to be at the tail-end of the day's work; and one never knew just when the next alarm would be. At about this stage of the voyage, boat-guards were appointed—two soldiers to each boat. These men, on an alarm being given, would seize their equipment and rifles, and hurriedly stand on guard with fixed bayonets in front of the boats to which they had been allocated. This practice was supposed to be a preventative measure in case men became somewhat panic-stricken during a genuine alarm, and tried to rush the boats. The futility of the proceeding, however, was most obvious. No boat-guard, no matter how good a soldier, would ever stick a bayonet into a comrade under any such circumstances unless, of course, men became wild beasts; and, besides, he and his mates could be most easily overpowered. Even the moral effect supposed to be exerted was lacking.

Another adoption in case of submarine attack was the establishment of a permanent naval guard. This comprised anything from thirty to fifty picked riflemen, who did regular turns of sentry day and night on various elevated posts about the different decks. These men were to watch for periscopes, and being armed with rifles,¹ their job on seeing

¹ The naval guard must have been instructed to throw their rifles at the periscope, as no ball-cartridge was ever served out to them, nor was it placed in any convenient position!

such a menacing contrivance was to endeavour to destroy it, and thus render blind the under-water monster. It was a lucky stroke, indeed, being selected for naval guard, because you at once became absolved from all regular parades or fatigues.

CHAPTER IX

AMUSEMENTS

A PART from the regular standard tables of physical drill inflicted on the troops during the early morning parade, the practice of having "O'Grady Drill" and "Saddle my Nag" was early introduced. The former was very popular. A squad would be informed that from a given moment they must not act on any order given them by their instructor unless he preceded the *executive word* with the phrase: "O'Grady says." For instance, "O'Grady says, Open ranks!" "O'Grady says, March!" not "O'Grady says, Open ranks, march!"

Then the fun would commence. Men habitually used to springing to it, would do so on a sharp word of command, which if not preceded by "O'Grady says" meant that the culprits moving would be shamefacedly brought out in front and handed over to the corporal for the real physical jerks. All manner of subtle devices would be used by the instructor. He would casually ask a man how long he had been in the A.I.F., and if the man replied, out he would be brought and the men on his

left would be ordered to close in, which often came off as "O'Grady" hadn't said so. But it was fearfully hard at first to refrain from falling-in over the following order: "O'Grady says, Turning by numbers," "O'Grady says, Turning to the right," "O'Grady says, One" (when the squad would turn, and at the completion of the movement their left foot would be to the left rear of the right foot, heel off the ground), "Two!" (without "O'Grady says"), and invariably the full movement would be carried out. You civilians try this and make it a new drawing-room game, and you will appreciate what I am trying to explain.

The game known as "Saddle my Nag" is very strenuous, but creative of much mirth. Two squads of, say, twelve men each, would compete and toss to see which one went "down." This meant that each man to go down would link together by means of head between legs and arms round loins to the man in front; feet on the ground and legs straight. Every one of the "down" men would be so situated, except the foremost man, who would have his back against a stay or support, and would be required to take the pressure of the men in front of him. The other side would then, man after man, run and leap-frog—one leap only—on to the back or backs of the "stooped" men until all had secured a mount. Should the supporters put hand to ground, or give under the weight above, before "ten" had been counted, they would be termed "weak horses" and would have to go down again. Should the riders fall off or touch ground with foot or hand within the allotted time, they would

have to go down. That is a rough description of the rules of "Saddle my Nag." The humorous side presented itself when some chap, bearing the weight of perhaps three big men on the small of his back, would crumble to earth under the load, sending the riders falling in all directions. Or the riders, riding three and four deep one on the other, would sway amid frantic yells and laughter, and finally fall headlong off their steady nags. This game was cut out half-way through the voyage owing to numbers of men sustaining knocks and sprains through participation in it. I would not advise ladies to introduce it as a means of killing time at a ladies' meeting or an afternoon party. The game is far too strenuous for that.

Some of the sergeants conceived the idea of forming a secret society amongst a few of their number, which soon swelled its ranks until more than half the mess had been issued with the secret badge of brotherhood. This gang then set about arresting outsiders—other sergeants—and trying them for all manner of ingenious and fantastically thought-out crimes. Fines of threepence, cigarettes, cigars, etc., would be levied, which in most cases were promptly paid. To counteract this society's baleful influence, an opposition society was formed and known as the Independent Order of Hummers and Bummers. Their motto was: "Never buy anything nor give anything." Think this over. The society has millions of unrecognized members. Before their designs were realized, almost all of the opposition had given the H. & B. members cigarettes, matches, and other articles, as the result of quiet

cadging with many plausible excuses for being short of the article. Finally, a dissolution of both societies was deemed advisable on account of there being too much horse-play between them, and their extinction was celebrated by a grand smoke-concert in the mess, to which the officers and ship's officers were invited.

Another diversion was created by the sergeants organizing a mock-trial, which also was attended by the heads, and hugely enjoyed. Many were the cleverly thought-out quips and jokes introduced during the case, and the officers laughed heartily at the situations in which the evidence placed them, and at the jokes at their expense.

The ships were steadily nearing our fourth foreign port of call, but before this was reached another burial at sea took place. The unfortunate chap, a victim of pneumonia, belonged to another ship of the convoy, and just before the body was slipped overboard this ship pulled out of the line and all the others slowed down, and we stood to attention as the far-away notes of the "Last Post" reached us from across the sea. Then the vessel moved back into her place in the line, and the convoy pushed on, now only a day out from our next port.

CHAPTER X

A MAN OVERBOARD

THE town looked very clean and pretty as we steamed into the small harbour in single file. Here we were to remain for three days. No reason was given for this decision. All the convoy was soon at rest, some of the ships being moored to buoys close into the shore. Some French warships were also here, and next day a passenger steamer, the *Ionic*, arrived, for a couple of days' stay. At this port, as at a former one, no one was allowed ashore, the reason being that "Other Australian units have run wild here." We were getting fed up with hearing what other Australian units had done and having to suffer for their sins, until finally the thing became a joke, and few men believed in its authenticity, the natural inclination leading to the suggestion that the colonel's liver was in chronic bad order.

The weather was still tropical, and parades being suspended temporarily the men were allowed to have a swim over the side. The danger from sharks had prevented this at former ports. In such a way many old friendships were renewed—short

visits of the boys between the various troop-ships being made possible. The *Ionic* was not the least vessel to be visited, and as she carried a big lot of passengers—mostly ladies—bound from Australia to England, the aquatic visitors were given a real good reception, and it became no uncommon sight to see bronzed and muscular Australian Tommies, their dripping costumes clinging like a second skin, being escorted below to the saloons and state-rooms by laughing damsels, there to partake of chocolates, cigarettes, and what other luxuries the fair ones thought would be most appreciated. Others of the boys were more venturesome, and swam ashore, where many of them found donkeys in charge of small urchins. These donkeys the swimmers at once commandeered and rode through the town and back to the beach, to the great amusement of the French population. It is with regret that I must recall the culprits' appearance at orderly-room next morning—that should learn 'em !

An incident of interest was the mounting of a naval gun on each of the troop-ships. This gun was mounted on the poop-deck, right at the stern, and with it came two Navy seamen gunners. Our unit supplied an amateur gun-crew for our gun, who did no fatigues or parades, but laid itself out to the learning of its new duties.

We were accompanied out of the harbour by a French warship, which stayed with the convoy for several days.

The next item of interest materialized shortly after leaving this our last port of call for the voyage. A naturalized British subject, of Russian birth,

whose quaint broken-English betrayed his nationality, had for some months suffered from the effects of a burst ear-drum, the result of the too near proximity of a bursting high explosive shell on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The attentions of the Iodine King had met with no success, and "Russia" was daily suffering more pain and violent ear-ache. One fine morning, when the ships were steadily progressing onward, Russia was noticed by some of the boys to climb over the bulwarks near the aft-men's wash-house. He was wearing a life-belt, and in a moment had disappeared over the side. The cry: "Man overboard!" went up, and the buglers at once blew, "Stand fast!" while the ship's officer of the watch immediately rang down "Stop!" to the engine-room. In a very few minutes our vessel had swung out of the line, and had been brought to a standstill, and the next minute a boat touched the water and went away after the reckless Russian, who was still observed to be floating serenely, head well above water, and rapidly nearing the next ship in our former rear. This vessel had quickly noticed the entire happening, and was even quicker than we in slewing off and lowering a boat. This boat ultimately picked up Russia and transferred him to our boat, and soon he was back on board, and snug and warm in blankets in the ship's hospital, and the convoy resumed its course once more. In two days Russia was well enough to become a resident in the clink—there to await orderly-room for attempted desertion. When he did come before the "beak," his excuse was a most quaint and original one:

"Fo long time I suffa much pain in my heed. He nearly drife me mad, and dis doctor—he not to me any good. So I tink maybe I go oferboard to other sheep where doctor perhaps he cure it. Better me dry every doctor on all sheep—better dan dis pain. He near keel me wif it ; hurt ver' much, sir."

Medical evidence was called, and it was learnt that a thin film was the only tissue between the prisoner's ear and his brain ; and as this tissue was commencing to decay the case was one of grave seriousness, and little could be done to alter the state of affairs. So Russia was liberated, but later placed under observation, all the time receiving what treatment the M.O.'s thought might assist to relieve him of his pain.

News of the known presence somewhere off the coast of an enemy raider had reached us at our last port, and which accounted for the addition of the French cruiser to our armed escort. Some days previously an Australian transport had steamed serenely out of Dakka on her way to England or France, intending to pick up a convoy which was waiting at some port farther north ; but a wireless message received on board had caused her hurriedly to abandon the enterprise, and she scurried back for safety, where she stayed until opportunity offered for a safe passage. At about this period we were informed that two British cruisers had gone out to locate the raider which, as yet, had not been caught, although she had only recently shelled one of the adjacent coastal towns.

• The troops were now compelled to wear their life-

belts from the time of getting up in the morning until bed-time ; and everybody had to keep his own belt under his head when in his hammock. So far, nobody except the ship's captain, the colonel, and the adjutant were supposed to be acquainted with the name of the port which was to be our ultimate destination ; and even these august personages were probably unaware of the "really truly" place to which we were bound, it being argued by some of our shrewd-head sergeants—and we had quite a few of these!—that fresh Admiralty orders would be received when just off England, advising the heads which port to make for. "Nobody on board knows," was the final decision of these fellows.

CHAPTER XI

NAVAL MANŒUVRES AND A MUTINY

THE novelty of troop-ship life and the ceaseless steaming on at night with all lights out, the sight of swarms of flying fish, sportive porpoise and dolphin, and the spouting of great whales at close hand—all these things failed to keep the troops in that state of keen anticipation which was noticeable earlier on the voyage. They were getting full up of a life on the ocean wave, and no small contribution to this state of things was the food served to the boys, which was now 100 per cent. poorer and less appetizing than during the first two or three weeks.

Besides, we were beginning to experience grey skies, and no longer did the sun's warm rays harmonize with the soft lift of the vessel in making us feel sublime and sleepy. To add to the greyness and bleakness of things, all the tropical awnings had been taken down, making the ship resemble a tree shorn of its summer foliage by reason of the arrival of winter.

But something occurred which wakened us up from the mental lethargy into which we had fallen.

On a moderately warm morning, with just the slightest swell on an otherwise smooth sea, there appeared, far away ahead on the horizon, dark specks, which on closer approach revealed themselves to be large transports. Eight there were, all converging on one point, and we learnt that they were the ships left behind by us at our second previous port, and included amongst them was the fugitive transport, which in some obscure way had joined up at this unique rendezvous at a definite spot on the ocean. It was all very wonderful, we thought—fifteen ships coming from different points and meeting simultaneously, and by mutual consent, on the broad trackless bosom of the great lonely sea. The wonders of exact navigation and timing! It required only a few minutes for the fleet to straighten out and manœuvre into two long lines, and the whole convoy once more took the road.

It did not occur to us, until later, that the British warship had slipped off during the night, forty-eight hours previously, and had cut off a corner and met the new group, which it escorted to the rendezvous. We further learnt that since leaving the last port, our course had gradually changed, so that we were going back south, where the meeting was arranged to take place; hence the warmer weather and the slight swell.

With the addition of the later vessels, our fleet now numbered fourteen ships, and it made an imposing spectacle, all these ships headed the one way, the black smoke pouring from their funnels, and the green water falling in white, frothy rollers

from their bows, and each ship alert and ready for the least sign of trouble from hostile craft.

Next day we received news by wireless that the raider had been sunk by her pursuers, and some time during the following night the French cruiser headed away from us, and we saw her no more.

The next incident of note was the running amok of one of the soldiers belonging to our vessel. He had nursed a grievance for some time until it had grown and intensified into something beyond all proportion to the original hurt, which was his failure to get ashore at a former port after putting in some hard work on the coaling stunt. The men mostly to blame for this building up of a small matter were some so-called sympathizers, who verbally agreed to back up the aggrieved one in an attempt to get even with the colonel; and he was actually influenced by these gentry into getting up on a hatch for'ard and proclaiming to all and sundry that he was going to take the ship. He thereupon called on all his mates and others to join him, and said that with three hundred men behind him he would show the officers their places.

Then he went aft, and calmly interviewed the colonel and his own O.C., to both of whom he expressed his opinion of them in no stinted terms. Why he was not then and there arrested nobody could say; and in a few minutes he was back for'ard, many devils shining out of his eyes, and urging and entreating the men to stand behind him. But his reign was short, and he was shot into a cell in the clink, there to await a field court-martial, which his crime of mutiny warranted.

Once cooled down, the prisoner became rational again and discussed in a mild and unassuming manner the reasons for his folly. It seems he had been supplied with a lot of whisky by his mates, and had been played upon by them until he completely lost his head. But he would not divulge anyone's name in connection with this part of the business. It is to be regretted that such blighters as his so-called mates existed in the ranks of those honoured men who carried the badge of the A.I.F.

Soon afterwards the court-martial sat. The day arrived when the charge against the accused, the finding of the court, and the sentence to be imposed would be read out to the prisoner in the presence of every unit on the ship. A great mass of khaki-clad men assembled on the main deck, and the prisoner was marched on to the hatch between guards with fixed bayonets. His bearing portrayed no uneasiness, as with head held high and eyes looking straight to the front, he faced the adjutant, who was to read out the fateful words. "And the court finds the prisoner guilty of the charge, etc. etc., and sentences him to two years' imprisonment with hard labour."

With a faint smile on his lips, the poor fellow heard the sentence, and a great number of those present felt sorry to think that such a good soldier and ex-Regular should have been the victim of a chain of circumstances nearly every link of which was woven by men who formerly called themselves his "mates."

We were nearing England. Every one knew it by the continuous grey sky and leaden-coloured

DAY OF CALIFORNIA



AND THE SEA BECAME ROUGHER

TO THE
ABORIGINAL

sea ; also it was quite cold now, and physical jerks became less disagreeable. And the sea became rougher. But in spite of a heaving deck, squads would carry on with the prescribed tables of physical drill, and much amusement was created when men would be ordered “ on the toes—r-r-a-i-s-e !—double knee—b-b-e-n-d ! ” which, when attempted, would invariably result in their tumbling over and getting mixed up with each other all about the deck.

CHAPTER XII

LANDING IN ENGLAND

WE were now close to old Blighty. There was no mistake about it, and the fellows began to sport all manner of woollen garments under their tunics, and mufflers and things round their necks. The usual wise-heads in our mess were certain, however, that our convoy had diverged from the ordinary trade route, and had taken in a big sweep of the Atlantic—the Admiralty course, they said it was. The troops had by this time become thoroughly used to being carried over the ocean with not the faintest idea as to where they were going to end up. At last, after many days' steaming over bleak seas, when we had just entered our tenth week of transport life, the rumour spread everywhere that we were just two days' steam off the English coast.

That same night, as darkness was falling, some men on the fo'castle head sent down the news that search-lights had been observed away ahead in the gathering blackness. All our mess—dinner was not quite ready—at once went on deck, where a strange sight met our astonished gaze. Out in

front from several different points we saw search-lights, which swept hither and thither, and all bearing down on us until we could presently see many low, dark forms tapering from bow to stern, from which the search-lights gleamed like great incandescent eyes. These forms, which we quickly recognized as British destroyers, darted here and there, constantly winking at each other messages and answers with their heliographs.

This busy movement was evidently the result of an order from our cruiser, wherein the detailing of the minute craft to the various troop-ships was the object. In about twelve minutes from first observing them, the destroyers had each attached itself to a troop-ship. Ours came down on us with tremendous speed, the spray from the choppy seas flying in great white clouds over her short bows, and when close alongside she turned round, her speed undiminished, in a great swirl of foam, and then slowed down. Something was signalled to our skipper, and we marvelled at the tremendously short turn the destroyer had taken. "She'd turn on a deenah,"¹ a corporal remarked.

The sea became very rough as the night went on, and our little fighting-ship stayed on our starboard beam, keeping her speed down to ours, although at times she would suddenly dart ahead and make a wide sweeping circle right round our vessel, to return and take up her former position. 'One could not help being struck with the thought of what a

¹ A shilling.

wonderful institution our British Navy was, when one looked at the coming of these minute ships of war, their manner of finding us fairly and squarely, and the businesslike air with which each one appropriated its big ward. Before midnight, a tremendous sea was running, and every one's hammock swung and swayed as it had not done since leaving the Australian coast.

Next morning, to our further astonishment, we found our ship the only vessel to be seen on a broad expanse of heaving waters. Not a sign of any other transport, and even our destroyer had gone. No one could understand it until inquiries among the ship's officers elicited the statement, that, owing to bad coal, we had dropped back and were steaming at a quite reduced speed, and also that the sea being so rough, rendered us safe from submarines, which could not operate against us in bad weather ; and further, that it was too rough for the destroyer to remain with us under such greatly reduced speed. So that was the lay of things, and it also illustrated just how rough the sea had become. We felt very forlorn and miserable every time we gazed out on the great mountains of green foam-crested water which came tumbling down upon us. As it later turned out, our ship was not the last of the convoy, as was generally thought ; another transport having fallen back many miles behind us, owing to her inability to make much headway against the head seas. Without encountering another vessel at any time, we sighted land early the next morning.

Land ! England ! At last !

This happening, of paramount importance, completely eclipsed everything else that had occurred as a stimulant to the men's excitement. Good old Blighty, after so many weary weeks! No longer need we fear submarines—who feared them?—or refrain from smoking after “Retreat!” had sounded, and henceforth we would not be obliged to eat meat which was still frozen when it was put on the fire to cook; and we would get away from a too close association with men whose every feature we knew off by heart. But where were we? That was the thing. Good old England!

The ship's officers told inquirers that the land ahead was the coast adjoining Plymouth; that we would be in Plymouth Harbour in three hours—that we would pass the famous Eddystone Lighthouse very soon. Everything materialized as predicted, and the ship was met by the harbour pilot-boat. Before entering the harbour, we saw numbers of patrol boats and mine-sweepers—those gallant craft about which we had read so much. Their quaint, low bows with the small gun—used for exploding mines—mounted thereon interested the men greatly, and all wondered how such small vessels fared in a rough sea. It was not long before we were at anchor in the harbour, where we found several of our convoy already unloaded; and close round us were moored a number of destroyers, and we were able to view them at close quarters. They were really much smaller than we, at first, had thought, and such frail-looking things: one wondered how on earth the

officers and crew fared in big seas regarding meals.

The troops were to go ashore about dusk, so the day was spent in returning stores and packing our kits. It was seven o'clock, and quite dark, when the railway company's big lighter came out to take us to the railway jetty, where we were to unload into the special trains to be provided. Shortly afterwards all the units with their kits were safely stowed into the lighter, and cheer upon cheer was given the old ship, her skipper and staff as the small vessel moved off. Little did we think, that ere two months would elapse our former home on the deep, with seventeen of her crew and the beloved Jacky and Nelly, would be lying in pieces at the bottom of the ocean as the result of the Huns' murderous hate-stunts.

A bitter cold wind blew through everybody during a two hours' wait we had to endure on the wharf before our special arrived. As we will always remember that morning of going ashore after the coaling, so we will not easily forget those two hours during which we perished with the intensely cold wind on that wharf at Plymouth.

Eventually, inwardly thanking God but cursing the railway people for their delay, we boarded the train—eight men to each compartment, and the train moved off, but not before everybody had been warned to keep the blinds down, as a military special was a choice target for any scouting Zeppelin. 'Struth! we had no sooner breathed relief at our escape from death-dealing contrivances under the

sea than we must be on the qui vive for possible destruction from the sky.¹

A rumour—you will notice by now their prevalence among the troops—earlier in the day that we were to be established close to Manchester, and which filled us with delight,—for who had not heard of the hardships of Salisbury Plain?—was quickly dispelled just before boarding the train. D—, a station on the Plain, was our destination as far as the railway was concerned. And during the day we had dwelt with pleasure on the many huge disadvantages troops had to undergo in that locality.

News of our real destination put a slight damper on the men's spirits, but we played nap and poker until well into the small hours of the morning. At midnight we stopped at E— for refreshments, kindly supplied free of charge to all passing troops by the Mayor and committee. Then we were moving again.

In our compartment nap was abandoned, and recollections of the voyage and Australia were discussed.

"I say, sawgint, do you remember how yer used to striten us blokes up when the old pot was arahnd?" a N.S.W. cockney of my platoon inquired with visible appreciation.

He was merely referring to those very tropical days when the instructors had their platoons on the hatches giving them lectures. We eventually got so fed up talking shop, and it was so hard to find

¹ Just after reaching Plymouth word was received that a Hun submarine had, some hours earlier, shelled a steamer twenty miles away from our position at that time.

a fresh subject that we had let them smoke and crack jokes for quite long periods. Of course, the moment any of our own unit officers, or the colonel or adjutant, were spotted coming our way, the following from us would be audible: "Here, you men, cut out the smoking! What do you mean by it? Sit up. Here you, Smith and Jones; stir that lazy galoot there, corporal! And as I was telling you"—here your voice travels—"every man is issued with two gas helmets: one for chlorine gas; this is called——" and one's voice would trail off into nothing as the O.C. would disappear just past our hatch. It was quite excusable from two points of view: the men had heard it so many times before, and now never listened, and the drill-book tells you to study your men and make their comfort your first consideration.

"I didn't 'alf laugh," went on the voluble soldier, "that evenin' when the colonel come up from mess smokin' a bleedin' cigar, and us blokes 'ad been ordered ter keep from smokin' 'alf an hour before, seein' we was in the dinger zone; and one bloke up and salutes, and asks the colonel could we smoke; and the colonel, 'e sort of feels guilty-like and tries to hide his smoke, but 'e knows we'd seen it, and 'e says, 'You may smoke for ten minutes, men,' says he. Blimey! that was a show—darn, that was. The orficers—they can do anything, they can."

"Fancy us fellers being bally infantry on our way to France," a College-bred soldier remarked. "It's so fearfully hard to realize that we will have route-marches and hump our packs, and our sportive nags

still carrying on at Menangle. And it cost me two quarts of Monopole to get a station Johnny friend of mine to go up to the riding test and ride in my name."

There was a general laugh at this, and also at the speaker's quiet, droll method of saying things.

"But you learnt to ride after you had joined the Light Horse?" some one inquired.

"Oh dear me, yes, after falling off absurdly quiet dames such as Friend Betsy, the mare that tries to emulate Gilpin. And to think that I fell off!"

"Gilpin—'e was a 'orse!" the cockney interrupted. "Why, 'e knew more'n any trooper. Gaw' blimey! 'ow 'e used to send 'em, and the look in 'is eye when some new chum bloke 'ud be brought up to ride 'im bare-backed and 'e wiff no mane or anythin' to hold on by. They 'ad 'im in the movin' pitchers. Tell me that 'orse didn't 'alf know that 'e was the star—the bloomin' hidol of the crowds wot uster see the ridin' tests—and played up to 'em too."

"Betsy," said the College man, "she used to work a good stunt. Get going at a real hard gallop for the first hurdle and then stop dead, and the Johnny would land well clear on the other side, or else take a quick swing round her neck like a living neck pendant."

"Anyway," remarked a long-legged farmer in the corner, "I wish you men wouldn't talk of those good times; I'm getting home-sick."

"Oh, this cruel war!" muttered the cockney, as he took a huge bite out of a fragrant ham sandwich, and settled himself back to drink from a

steaming mess-tin of cocoa. This done he lit a "Capstan" and lolled on the cushioned seat ready for further reminiscences, while the train rushed through the night and bore us on towards Salisbury Plain.

CHAPTER XIII

SALISBURY PLAIN

WE awoke with a start, stiff with the cold and our feet chilled to the bone. We had arrived at D——. Our wrist-watches showed the time to be just past 3.30 a.m. Five minutes later the units had stumbled out and deposited all heavy baggage in an orderly stack on the platform, and we formed up in column-of-route. A guide from our group headquarters on the Plain had been sent to show us the way to what was to be our home for six or eight weeks, and the procession got under way.

We passed through D——, a tiny village of typical English pattern, and headed along a road which typified the English lane that one reads about. The column was allowed to march "easy," and soon cigarettes glowed and glimmered from front to rear. This marching on a road lined on either side with hedges, the sweet-smelling fields beyond, and the road surface ideal for the motorist, was anything but a hardship. Besides, we were getting warm, and the keen, fresh, country air was like a tonic. Also, the regular "tramp," "tramp"

of the men's feet on the hard surface made splendid music to which we could march.

One could not help voluntarily ejaculating, "At last!" as we swung along, and thinking that now indeed we were really part of Britain's great armies. We were marching over the same roads which bore the tramp and traffic of those gallant Canadians who had suffered so heavily at Ypres, and whose pictures while undergoing training on the white levels and in the snow-covered lanes of Salisbury Plain we had seen at the "movies" in Australia.

After travelling three miles, and just when we were beginning to realize that we had "full marching order" on, the column came to a halt, and we learnt that the guide had brought us quite two miles past the road where we should have turned off. So we headed about and retraced our steps. After a mile and a half, we were taken a short cut to the desired road; but it was a regrettable piece of strategy. Every one got more or less bogged in a mucky field, and we had to scramble over a barbed-wire fence and two railway gates, where some of the men only just jumped clear of the line to let a flying express whiz by.

At 6 a.m., when the moonlight had changed to early dawn, we reached our destination. This was a well-spread group of long, red-coloured huts, which were of such numbers that the farthest ones lost themselves in the distance. This was Camp No. 9, situated at H——, a tiny spot on the great Plain. Here was located the 8th Training Battalion to which we would belong until we had been

sufficiently trained to join up with our own battalion in France.

Immediately on our arrival, the duty sergeants attached to the battalion took control of our own reinforcement, showed the officers and sergeants their respective quarters, and allotted the various sections of the two platoons to the few huts in the lines which were unoccupied.

Nobody was sorry to throw off his heavy pack and equipment, and, when all this gear had been deposited on the floor space allotted to each man for sleeping purposes, the unit filed into the dining-hall for hot tea and biscuits. This snack and a cigarette helped to drive sleepy feelings away, and, after a wash in icy-cold water, we looked about us to get the lay of the land, and learn from the already domiciled sergeants something of what we had to do next.

"You will have nothing to do for forty-eight hours from noon to-day," one said, "because everybody of the unit has to be inoculated about eleven o'clock this morning; and, as you know, after inoculation forty-eight hours' light-duty is granted, which means no duty for a new reinforcement; so that will give you time to get your bearings."

In addition to our camp, we learnt that there were many such camps dotted over the huge area devoted to the training of the Colonial troops in England. Many of the camps were close to the railway, while others were several miles away, and each one resembled another—a mass of low, red-painted huts in rows, line after line of them, with wide training-areas out beyond, upon which

were trenches, rifle-range, and all the conveniences necessary to modern warfare training. Roads and lanes, lined with the inevitable hedges, ran here and there, and scattered about were small farms, hills, and wooded country. Quaint villages, and in some cases minute towns, were dotted over the landscape, each village boasting its towered stone church, and its old-fashioned inn with the usual lines of poplar or oak trees lining the roads on either side.

The training battalion, made up of earlier reinforcements not yet sent overseas, A, B, and C class men, paraded shortly after breakfast, and some of us curious ones strayed close and observed the businesslike methods which prevailed.

Instead of, as in Australia, one instructor taking a squad for the day and varying the work, there were different skilled instructors for each department of the training. There were experts in musketry, others for platoon and company drill and rifle exercises, experts in bombing, different ones again for bayonet fighting and physical drill, and still others for the various other departments, such as gas, signalling, trenches, range finding, machine-guns, etc. All these instructors were the product of the most modern training schools in the different subjects, these schools being situated in various parts of England, and the men graduating to be instructors being required to pass very stiff exams. in order to get their certificates.

A weekly training syllabus directed each company as to its day's work, and the training would go on thus : a squad would be taken over by the physical

jerks N.C.O. for half an hour ; then it would find itself in the hands of a gas expert for another half-hour ; it would then rejoin the other squads of the company and do company drill, with rifle exercises in small squads to follow. After the 10.30 smoke, more small squads for elementary musketry, and later extended-order drill, which would be over by dinner hour. After dinner, battalion parade and a route-march to finish the day, or else bayonet fighting ; more physical drill and more musketry. As soon as an instructor had spent a short period with one squad, it would depart and another squad would come along. Thus the work rarely became monotonous, and the men had their interests sustained all the time. The authorities rightly believed that variety was the spice of life to the Tommy. Bombing, range practices,—everything would have its allotted periods, and when men had qualified in all the various subjects they would be ready to go over to France in drafts of from ten to one hundred or more men. In France, they would be put through the “ bull-ring ” or battalion training camp there, to learn further and more deeply how to beat the Hun ; and then they would go up into the firing-line and become absorbed into their own original battalion—perfectly trained troops and ready and eager to put their knowledge to the test.

CHAPTER XIV

CHIEFLY YARNS

OUR fellows very soon settled down to the routine of English camp life. Their food was considerably above the average served them on the troop-ship, and every soldier was provided with a straw-stuffed palliasse for a mattress, and from four to six heavy English blankets. The huts each contained a heating stove, for which ample fuel was provided and which quite took the chill from the keen night air. A corporal in each hut was made hut-commander, and he had to be responsible that the hut was kept clean and tidy—orderlies for this work being at intervals detailed. Also, the corporal had to call a roll of his hut occupants every night at "tattoo" and report the result to the company's orderly-sergeant. The sergeants of each company had their own hut, and a sergeants' mess catered quite well for their inner man.

Our unit being somewhat advanced in general training, was absorbed into "A" Company of the battalion, and the men looked smart and soldierly on their first battalion parade. At this stage, now

the middle of winter, the days and nights were the coldest most of the men had ever experienced in their lives, the hardships on account of this being more accentuated because of our recent gruelling days in the Tropics.

There was no early morning parade. The unit fell in at 7.30 for breakfast after an hour of dressing and straightening blankets and kits. Following the 9.30 battalion parade, physical drill was undertaken. All men participating were compelled, first of all, to discard tunics, cardigan jackets, puttees, and hats. Then they were ordered to roll up their sleeves and open their shirts at the throat. This done, they had to listen to a "lecturette," during which the poor fellows would stand shivering in the intensely frosty air. Then the drill would commence, hard and severe, and eventually after a smart "double," every one would feel hot, and not a few perspired freely. To counteract the heat, the squad would be "spelled" for five minutes, or else given exercises not calculated to raise the circulation, such as deep breathing or "On the toes!—raise." These spells allowed the men to contract severe chills, because the wind, always prevalent, was icy and went right through you. But more of this matter anon.

We sergeants would sometimes stroll into the men's huts after evening mess, and would sit among them and listen to the talk that was going on. Everything was discussed, from experiences during civil life to what they intended to do in London when on disembarkation leave. One night the talk centred on practical jokes which some of the

boys had witnessed or participated in before enlistment. A burly ex-navvy of Sydney had the floor on one occasion as we strolled in and sat down.

"That time, when the excavations was bein' took out uv that hill just over Pyrmont Bridge, and thousands uv tons uv clay 'ad ter be carted away, blokes with drays would git 'alf a dollar a load to git it out uv the road. Well, lots of the 'ard-case blokes had tipped their loads anywhere at all to git rid of 'em quicker, 'coz more loads took, more 'alf-dollars. I seen one bloke wot tipped 'is load down a Chow's cellar wot was open, and the Chow 'ad to giv' 'im three deenahs ter git the stuff took out agin. Another uv these blokes—'e was goin' alorn' with 'is load, and a lady on the footpath sees 'im and comes over to ask 'im where she could git some loads like that. This bloke—'e was my mate—'e tells 'er 'e can git 'er plenty. She says she wants a few loads spread on 'er back-yard, and tells 'im w'ere the 'ouse was, not far away. Then she says she wouldn't be 'ome that arternoon, and the gate would be locked, but will he bring some ter-morrer, and off she goes. Well, my mate, soon as she'd gorne—and it was two o'clock then—he away to the 'ouse, lifts the gate off its 'inges, and empties 'is load by the back-door. And when the lady come 'ome just before dark, she couldn't open the back-door, as he 'ad tipped eighteen dray-loads there, and the gate was back on its 'inges, and she didn't know 'im or w'ere 'e worked. Oh, 'e was a smart 'un, 'e was!"

We were laughing heartily as the navvy finished

his story, and before our mirth had quietened another chap had commenced.

“I remember a cove that got even with the butcher once. This butcher had a fine, beautifully-clean, big shop, with marble everywhere, and he had a large number of counter-customers who belonged to the best class of people. Well, this other fellow somehow got hold of two small dead rabbits, which he skinned and packed into a brand-new shoe-box—you know those cardboard boxes. Then he scribbled on the lid a short note :

“ ‘DEAR MARY,—I changed your shoes, and the boot-man thinks that this pair will fit much better.
TED.’

The box was neatly tied up with fine pink string, and addressed to :

MISS MARY LEYLAND,
Macleay Street,
Potts Point.

An hour later it had been handed in at the shop, with instructions that Miss Leyland would call for it in a day or two, on her return from the country. In three days' time nobody employed in the shop, much less the toadying employer, would have dreamt that the neat, clean box of ladies' 'shoes,' resting on a high marble shelf near the roof, was the sole cause of a very disagreeable odour which began to pervade the shop, and which grew thicker and more powerful every day. Meat carcasses, everything and every corner of the shop was sub-

jected to a close search. Lady customers of Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay, calling in their carriages to choose special joints, would enter the shop and then immediately turn tail and flee from the place, and be quickly driven away. The butcher grew frantic. Almost every bit of marble, flooring, and blocks was rubbed over with a strong disinfectant, but the high odour was not obliterated. After five days had elapsed and the boots had not been called for, a curious shop-hand opened the box, and a concentrated whiff caught him full in the face and hurled him backwards. But he recovered himself and called his employer, and the joke was realized. I was doing the man's books at the time, and I know that quite eight or ten good customers left off buying from us."

A corporal, an ex-policeman of Sydney, cleared his throat after the laughter, and began :

"The Chows used to be victims of the dealers and other fellers. A Chow would call at the back kitchen of the pub with his basket full of vegetables, and leave his 'orse and cart outside, around the corner. The blokes knew he'd be away twenty minutes or so, and they'd take the 'orse out and run the cart to the fence and stick the shafts right through the palings, and then 'arness the 'orse into the shafts again on the other side. First time I saw it I nearly died laughin'—the turn-out looked so silly ; and sometimes these fellers would almost undo the traces and things, and they'd look all right until the 'orse had to shift, then he'd simply walk out of the cart and it would bump its shafts on to the ground, tumbling the Chow out over the front

board, and all the coves laughin' like 'ell from some doorway."

When the room had quietened down, a late storeman took a turn :

" I'll never forget the effect of different fake-ads. that I seen. It came out among the ads. in the *Herald* once that a firm near us wanted thirty boys, wages a pound a week. Well, you oughter 'ave seen the crowd there before the place opened—hundreds of boys of all ages, and the rush when the boss come ! He was dazed at first till he saw the paper ; then he knew it was a joke on 'im. And 'e 'ung out a placard, ' No Boys wanted,' outside his buildin' ; but three boys had been hired to take it down and duck with it every time. And all day new boys kept comin'. And the boss—'e was as mad as a 'atter at five o'clock that night, 'coz 'e'd been chasin' boys away all day and lost a lot of time. And some one faked an ad. sayin' that cats was wanted—a shillin' a head would be paid. Well, you oughter 'ave seen the sight. Kids and women kept comin' all day from all directions, carryin' 'ampers and bags with yowin' cats inside, and not a cat around for miles but was in one of them bags."

We all had a lively imagination, and the different pictures conjured up by the various narrators kept us in shrieks of laughter. The humour of each narrative was highly accentuated by the picturesque blasphemy with which it was invariably clothed. One of the sergeants—a Melbourne man—was the next to amuse us :

" About the toughest joke—villainy, I call it—I ever saw put on anyone was this : there was a

small shop in a little town near Melbourne, a fruit-shop, kept by a woman who had earned, ever since she had come there, a reputation for meanness, and a manner which frequently insulted decent customers. There was a barmaid, quite a hard case and a sport, in one of the hotels, and shortly after she had taken this job she went into the fruit-shop to buy some fruit. Any'ow, the woman insulted her. Later on, the woman got a bit sick. Hearing this, the barmaid dressed up a bit swagger and went down to an undertaker's shop. She was leaving the town for good that morning, so didn't care. She told the undertaker, who had never seen her before, that Mrs. So-and-So was very ill and likely to die, and that she had insisted on a certain procedure being done; that the doctor had agreed to it to ease her, and would the undertaker go down at once. So off he goes, quite impressed by the superior manner and personality of his caller, and when he got to the door he sees the husband only in the shop. So he meets him and straightaway offers his sincere condolences about his wife. Well, the husband was all at sea, and calls out: 'Lizzie, come here and see what this man wants!' And out from a back room comes his wife. Well, that fool of an undertaker tells her he's glad she's up and out of bed, and pulls out his tape and runs it along from her head to her feet before the woman realizes what he is doing. And then he explains, seeing her amazed look, that he is measuring her for a coffin. Well, the shock nearly settled her, and she had to be put to bed, and then it all came out. But they never found that barmaid again."

CHAPTER XV

OUT AND ABOUT. THE COLD SNAP

TWO weeks of hard training had been undergone since our arrival in England. The men were, by now, acquainted with the usual routine of camp life, and during their spare time had wandered to all the outlying small villages and towns, the non-existing delights of which they had fully explored. Unless it happened to be their "duty" week, when a number of the men of "A" Company would be detailed for guard and picket duty, the entire company had no parades to attend between noon on Saturday until Monday morning. No week-end leave was granted, but passes would be issued daily to those who desired to go more than five miles from the camp. Public motors plied frequently to the adjacent towns and villages, and the men would pair off and visit everything worth seeing.

Picket duty was, at first, a new experience. Every evening during duty week, a company had to supply a picket of from twelve to twenty men each, for adjacent villages. The duty of the picket was to keep order among the soldiers, clear the hotels and

inns at 9 p.m., and bring home any A.I.F. men found creating a disturbance or committing any breach of the regulations. Needless to say, the men of the picket found time to answer any inquiries made to them by fair members of the opposite sex, and not a few friendships sprang up in this way.

As no lights were allowed to stream out from the shops, and the street-lamps were few and far between, the thoroughfares were quite dark, and many a smartly-uniformed picket would collide with some damsel out shopping. Then apologies, and ultimately a lengthy conversation, would result. The Australians were supposed to have a bad reputation in these small hamlets, and we had heard that all the girls were kept indoors when darkness fell; but it seemed just the reverse, and the black looks given the Colonials by the numerous Territorials walking about spoke volumes re the former's popularity.

There is no evidence available of any instance where English girls and women were not treated with the greatest respect by the average Australian, and I, personally, never saw anything to justify such a reputation. I will say that, everywhere I have been, the girls were seldom seen talking to the Territorials; the A.I.F. men holding a complete monopoly in this respect.

Route-marching was much preferred to ordinary training, and always we had our own battalion band with us. Generally, the march would cover six to eight miles, and it was most interesting to tramp along truly rustic lanes and through typically English hamlets. Thus we could observe the

small farmer at work, and many were the jests which passed down the column regarding the size of the fields and meadows and the never-to-wear-out carts and implements in use.

"How'd that two by four medder with its huge single-furrow plough do for raisin' ten thousand bushels of wheat, Bill?" one Australian would ask another.

And another would exclaim:

"Did yer see that huge great cart that bloke was drivin' one small can ter the milk-factory in, Jim? 'Struth! my kid could run it there on his toy trolly!"

Then we'd pass a Territorial battalion out on its march, the Terriers contrasting notably with our men by reason of their pink cheeks and smaller physique. You would hear banter and chaff between the columns, and a few irrepressible, jocular inquiries from the Australians, taking off the Englishmen.

"Got a Woodbine, chum?"

It was not until later that we learnt that to so address a Terrier was a great mistake, as it immediately proclaimed us to be "tender-feet" soldiers just arrived from our mothers.

The third week of our training had passed when the cold snap came. For the first few days the air was icy, with heavy frosts each morning, and then it began to snow, and all the ponds were found to be frozen sufficiently for skating purposes. At this stage, our men experienced a rough time of it. Their blood was still thin by reason of their own climate and having lived in the Tropics for three

and a half weeks on the home trip, and they daily felt perished. The methods of the physical training experts soon told. Each morning the "sick" parade swelled its numbers; quite strong men finding themselves suffering severely from the frequent chills contracted while standing half-stripped in an icy wind during physical jerks. More jerks were caused by violent shivering than by the exercises.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MILITARY HOSPITAL

THE military hospitals in Wiltshire were crowded out with Australians and some few Englishmen, the majority of the former being men of recently-arrived reinforcements. The intensely cold weather had left its mark in the ranks of the Colonials, and many a man gave his life for his country without getting beyond his English training camp. Every day the motor ambulances would be plying between camps and hospitals, and still more men would be admitted.

Once at the hospital, unless you were a stretcher-case, you would be shown into a ward where a seat would be found for you. Presently a V.A.D. nurse would stick a clinical thermometer under your tongue, and take particulars re your name, number, and unit; and you would be required to sign a receipt for hospital "issue." This included a suit of "blues"—hospital uniform—singlet, shirt, red tie, slippers, socks, towel, bed linen, denomination ticket, and eating utensils. The nurse would then make a note of your temperature and pulse, and you would be shown to a cot, and henceforth,

while a patient, you would be known as Patient No. 26 or whatever number was painted on the wall over your cot.

Then, if the pack-store and linen-store were open, you would draw your issue, and later hand in everything you had brought, except toilet necessities; then to bed. If a stretcher-case, all these things would be done for you, and the doctor would be on hand for examination and treatment. Once a patient is admitted, unless very seriously ill, he soon learns the routine of the ward. He is a bed patient at first: that is, he is not allowed out of bed on any consideration until such time as the doctor marks his diet-sheet to notify that he is entitled to get up for a few hours each day; and later he becomes a regular up-patient. The routine—you cannot get away from routine, you see, in the Army—is something like this, commencing from daybreak. If a light sleeper, the first thing that wakes you—perhaps about a quarter to seven—is a hubbub, and a sharp voice saying: "Come along, Twenty-seven, get washed." You are not Twenty-seven, you dimly realize, as you turn over: it is the chap next to you, and he is sitting up, heavy-eyed and half asleep, and dimly conscious of the presence of the basin of warm water resting on a chair beside his cot and which he must use for a face-and-neck sluice. So you close your eyes, feeling uneasy, because soon it will be: "Come on, Twenty-six, get washed!" and you are so sleepy, and you inwardly curse the "Pommey" orderly for waking you so early.

After having a wash you can sleep until breakfast

is brought in ; but this is seldom possible, as the warm water quite wakes you up and sleep departs. You look about the long, narrow ward. Most of the patients are still slumbering, though a number of the worst cases are coughing violently and spitting into their spittle-cups. Then the night-sister comes in, looking worn and beaten, and she goes to some patient, ministering to his requirements. There is no mistaking the night-sister, because she is wearing a heavy coat over her uniform, as the long nights are cold, even in the stove-heated wards, and you would never confuse her with the night V.A.D., who would find it impossible to look as tired as the sister, or to wear the same teacher-about-to-cane-the-little-boy expression. The R.A.M.C. ward orderly comes in and removes your wash-basin, and proceeds to stoke up the two stoves. Half an hour later all the up-patients have shaved and washed in the patients' wash-room, just inside the ward entrance, and are now sitting round the stoves with plates, cutlery, and mugs in their hands waiting for the breakfast-bell to ring in the dining-hall.

Presently you hear a faint tinkle, and the blue-clad forms make a hurried exit. About this time the day-nurse comes in, smiling cheerfully, though she has her moods and might come in looking a trifle severe next morning. You say, "Good morning, nurse ; you look nice and fresh this morning." The nurse smiles at you, and makes a mental note to give you a large helping of porridge with plenty of milk and sugar. This is what you aimed at, as you have learnt something since you were

able to sit up and eat a milk diet. The day orderlies arrive with the in-patients' breakfast—three big buckets of milk, tea and porridge, and a plate of grilled bacon. Soon you are consuming a liberal bowlful of porridge, a mug of milk, and, if good with an orderly, a piece of bread and a slice of bacon. At this stage the night-sister and the night-nurse have had a final look-round and if not too tired they say: "Good-bye, everybody!" and depart. You echo their good-bye, and suddenly change it for, "Good morning, sister," as the day-sister sweeps into the ward. She is your "Czar" is the day-sister, and you look for signs of sunshine or storm during the next twelve hours as she says: "Good morning, everybody." If she smiles you know it will be all right, and you lie back on the pillow and watch the patients, who are up-patients, but not dining-hall patients. These men are required to gather up the used eating utensils, take them out to the ward kitchen, wash and dry them, and return them to the various lockers of the patients alongside their respective cots.

Some little time later the day-sister is heard detailing the up-patients not already on some task to various jobs in the ward, such as sweeping, dusting, scrubbing, and generally straightening up the ward. You tire of the now stale spectacle of witnessing others at work while you lie back among the pillows, and so snuggle yourself down to sleep once more. But the V.A.D. quickly disturbs you to learn your temperature or pulse, or to remake your bed. The dining-hall patients have returned from breakfast by now, and are at work cleaning the

ward. Your bed has been made, and you work into it feet first, as you cannot get in in any other way. Being prohibited from smoking, you wait till the day-sister departs to her duty-room, and then reach in your locker for a cigarette, which you smoke with great relish, all the time keeping a wary eye on the door. Should the sister come in suddenly, you hold the glowing fag under the blankets until it burns your fingers, and then quietly throw it under or on to the chair of No. 27, if he is, in your opinion, a bounder. But perhaps the sister goes out again and you finish your smoke in peace. Then the daily papers arrive, and you read what is going on in the outside world: instead, you may sleep.

"Everybody who is up, come and get your medicines," sings out the sister, and you awake after a ten minutes' nap to swallow "Miss Expect," "Miss Tussie," or some other concoction.

By 10.30 o'clock the ward is clean, everything is in order, and the cots are all straight. The patients' diet-sheets are now taken from their hooks, and put on each bed ready for the morning visit of the doctor.* As the sister is away a lot of her time at a neighbouring ward—for she has two wards—the patients fill in the intervals of her absence by smoking. The V.A.D.'s mild remonstrance against a forbidden practice is nicely quelled by sweet, soothing sentences from the smokers, and heart-rending appeals against such sternness with poor, helpless invalids. A patient, just finished some job out in the kitchen, scurries in to warn all hands that the doctor is coming. Cigarettes are instantly

doused, and the groups round the two stoves break up, and the up-patients stand in rows between the cots beside their respective diet-sheets, while the gabble is hushed immediately.

The doctor enters, followed by the sister. He interviews each patient in turn, examines the diet-sheet, perhaps marks it "Ordinary," "Dining-hall," "Milk," or "Fish" as the case suits. Some of the worst cases he subjects to the stethoscope. Several of the men who have been on "dining-hall" for two or three weeks, and who are now almost free from any ailment, wear a "sick" expression—easily acquired with practice—and inwardly rehearse the tale they intend the doctor to hear in reply to his: "Well, how are you to-day?"

One man would invent an imaginary "Pain in the chest to-day, sir." Another had "Coughed for half an hour just before day-break, sir," while a third was "Still very weak, sir." This practice was adopted by the men who wished to stay in hospital a few days longer rather than go back to the lines, and was termed by the patients "swinging the lead."

Others, less lazy, would tell the doctor they felt quite well and ready for work again. But every day a few patients would be marked "Out" and their cots allotted to new arrivals.

Medical inspection would be over in less than an hour, and bed-patients would either sleep or read until dinner-time. The dining-hall patients and all up-patients would be ordered out of the ward if the day was fine, otherwise they would walk across to the dining-hall and would write, read, or

play a game of ping-pong during the hour or so before dinner.

On fine days, the up-patients would be allowed to stroll up and down the asphalt in front of the wards, but were not allowed to go farther even with N.C.O.'s in charge. Generally, the hour before dinner was a most boring period. There was nothing to do, really, and one soon got fed up with reading. The in-patients' dinner was brought to them punctually at a quarter to one, when some would get "Ordinary"—meat and vegetables—while others could only have "Fish" or, if bad cases, "Milk." There was always a milk pudding for everybody except the "No diet" patients. We never saw these chaps receive any food, though they must have absorbed some sort of nourishment.

After dinner, the only work done by the up-patients would be the "strap-up" of the eating utensils and the straightening up of the occupied beds. The door of the dining-hall was locked half an hour before each meal, and in order to get an early serving patients would assemble outside like people waiting for early doors, and when the door was opened they would file in, those in the rear being compelled to stand in a queue and await their turn to be served. The advantages of getting in early were numerous: you could "wolf" your helping and thus be early to back up again for more before it was all gone. You didn't run the risk of only getting the tiniest helping through a shortage, and you would make sure of getting a fair go at the pudding. This was only one system of feeding dining-hall patients and it had its advantages for

and against, the disadvantage being that on odd days, when rations were limited, unless care was exercised by the V.A.D.'s serving, the last men to be helped would go without a complete meal.

Other dining-hall systems which generally met with success were those where all the men were required to be seated before the serving of the meal commenced.

During the afternoon there was practically no work for any patient, and it is safe to say that many letters to relatives and friends in "Aussie" would not have been written but for the long weary hours between dinner and tea. Writing materials, toilet necessities, and the wherewithal to smoke were distributed among the Australians throughout the hospital once a week. This was the work of the Australian Red Cross, and that organization is to be congratulated upon a system whereby no Australian in any hospital was likely to be overlooked in regard to these gifts, and the men's appreciation of the articles received was a fitting tribute to the wisdom of the selection. During my sojourn in various hospitals in England there was no evidence of such gifts being bestowed upon the English troops which did not come from overseas, and we somehow felt sorry for the Tommies, who, beyond receiving toilet articles as a "kit issue," did not, to our knowledge, fall in for any other articles beyond a few "Woodbine" cigarettes.

Tea consisted of bread and margarine, with jam or cheese and a bowl of strong tea, and this sumptuous repast was available at 4.30 p.m. Then more leisure until seven o'clock, when a supper of hot

cocoa with bread and dripping was on issue. By eight o'clock everybody would be tucked into bed and all lights switched off except one shaded electric globe, which threw its soft glow up and down the ward from somewhere about midway, and it was during the stillness of these hours before sleep came that men's thoughts would go back to those loved ones in Australia from whom they were indefinitely separated by cause and distance.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CONVALESCENT HOME

AFTER a spell in hospital ranging from two or three weeks to several months, according to the nature and extent of the affection upon a patient, that patient would reach the convalescent stage and, if still weak, would be sent off to a convalescent home, perhaps only a few miles away, for a fortnight's rest. Should he be strong enough to endure light-duty in camp, he would return to the training battalion. The convalescent homes for soldiers, of which there are some thousands in the British Isles, are mainly run by Voluntary Aid Detachments in connection with the hospitals, and are invariably large private residences generously lent by the owners for this purpose.

When you become an inmate of one of these havens of rest, the first thing that strikes you is the home-like atmosphere of the place and the courtesy and marked cordiality of your reception. Here, you feel, is something of which you had hardly dared to dream about : well-educated English girls of good family to tend you, and a palatial old English country residence in which to live, and no obvious

military discipline. You feel of some importance in the world after all, and the jovial "Hurrah, here's another Australian!" of the Matron or receiving V.A.D. quite makes you feel a "blinkin' ero" at the least. And it is only when, days after your admission into the home, you are witnessing the arrival of a fresh batch of convalescents that you learn what tact is. You have just heard the same young lady exclaim, when about to assist a man of the R.H.A. from the ambulance, "Oh, how nice! You belong to the Royal Horse Artillery, don't you?"

Although still wearing hospital blue, the inmates of an English convalescent home are, to use one patient's words, "up the social ladder" to what they were in the military hospital. You are no longer addressed or referred to as "Number 26," but receive your rank and surname; and you are not "ordered" to do something—you are asked if you would mind doing it. Not that this observation should in any way reflect upon the staffs of the military hospitals, but the absence of strict military discipline in the convalescent homes, and the employment there of young ladies who have not yet dropped their politeness for "professional method," is responsible for so obvious a change. Almost all the V.A.D.'s one meets in the latter institutions are refined, and many of them are daughters of the English aristocracy and "come to work" in their own motors. Frequently it is the custom for them to be employed only on certain days in the week, the number attached to the establishment being sufficient to allow this. Thus, one day—a duty-day

—will find the Honourable Phyllis Blank on her knees most of the morning scrubbing out a small ward, or making beds, and the next day she is at her father's mansion entertaining a Cabinet Minister or a member of the House of Lords. These future "ladies of England" are certainly learning more about human nature than their mothers did before them, and it would not be foolish or boastful to prophesy that their daily association with the many types of Nature's gentlemen from the Colonies who at times receive their ministrations is going to be responsible in no small measure for their better understanding of mankind and the world in general.

After receiving a "limited" meal at the hospital, it was a great joy to find that one could get much better accommodation in that respect at the convalescent home. And there were fires in every room. Further, we were allowed to walk about the village for two hours each morning and afternoon, or we were taken for a run in one of the V.A.D.'s motors. This latter was a great joy, and the pleasure was twofold when such an outing meant visiting some old castle or being received for afternoon tea by one of the ladies of the county. In this way the men from the Antipodes saw quite a lot of England's country life, and such trips incidentally led to many amusing and refreshing arguments and explanations between the Australians and their various hostesses, regarding custom and tradition.

The following dialogue between the wife of a baronet and a plain wheat-farming "Billjim" is typical of many which have occurred on such occasions :

Hostess : " There's one thing I want to know, please. Why is it that your men are so different from English Tommies—I mean—yes, they seem ever so much more alert, bigger in their ideas, able to think for themselves, and their physique is so much better ? "

Billjim : " I suppose it is partly due to freedom from custom and tradition. "

Hostess : " Yes, of course ; yes, but just how does that make such a difference ? "

Billjim : " Out in Australia you are an independent being. If you are a worker, you are generally on the lookout to improve your earnings, and as tradition in respect to employer or capitalist and the reverence due to them in England is not a part of the Australian workman's mental equipment, you simply leave your job if it does not suit you and go to another. I mean this—there is little of the hereditary trait so common in England that what was good enough for the father was good enough for the son. Our fellows are not good machines or parts of machines. They have to think, and their pioneer ancestors had to think ; and since the early days of English settlement in Australia it has been a case of expansion, and expansion breeds individual thought and action. Besides, capital in our country has not to reach the stage it has here, and one quickly realizes that it is impossible to starve there, and so one can branch out in any direction. It isn't capital so much as an overcrowded population which keeps the British workman down in this country. This, of course, is only from my own observation. Here in England, if

a man was advertised for, there would be numbers willing to step in, even at a frightfully low wage. In Aussie there'd be nobody after the job unless the pay was good."

Hostess: "That's most interesting, but it wouldn't be a good country for the capitalist, then?"

Billjim: "Why not? The capitalist would get more than a fair return for the money invested, but he wouldn't get the maximum of profit for the minimum of wages as he does here. A sweat-shop capitalist would have no employés there."

Hostess: "Yes, I am beginning to understand. It is because the country is so undeveloped, and there are plenty of opportunities for employés to become employers, and when development is so necessary, that makes it possible for a man to go on his own—clearing land, doing Government work on new railways, development work everywhere, I suppose?"

Billjim: "Yes. You see, even without capital of any kind one can take a small contract in that way and thus become an employer and be sure of a good return for the work done at various stages."

Hostess: "And I suppose our men, finding no incentive for the exertion of any thought beyond that directly concerned with the work they are doing, do not develop the habit of initiative?"

Billjim: "That's just about it. But when they go out to Australia they soon learn to think."

Hostess: "So you would suggest that in the case of the English workman it is not altogether a matter of tradition—more a lack of scope?"

Billjim: "Yes, principally; and wages are much

higher there, whereas cost of living in normal times is not so correspondingly high as some English people imagine. Take the ordinary surfaceman or navvy on a railway. In Australia he gets from 8s. 6d. to 12s. per day, and he pays from 14s. to £1 per week for board and lodging. Here he gets somewhere about 21s. to 23s. 6d. per week and pays from 11s. to 14s. for his keep, so I'm told, but I'm not well informed about English rates of pay or living."

Hostess: "And where would custom and tradition show a deteriorating influence, then, in this country?"

Billjim: "That's rather a large order. But since you specially invite the criticism, I might cite one or two instances. It is owing to tradition that the younger or subordinate is not allowed to have an opinion if there is an older opinion available. It would be deemed disrespectful if an employé or even a junior in the house tried to air an opinion that was not asked for. In this way individualism is crushed at the outset, and it is not the custom to ask the why and the wherefore. That would be the thin end of the wedge of thought, and thought might breed discontent, and discontent might result in the breaking away from customs which sufficed for the parent and grandparent."

Hostess: "The whole situation, then, is that this country has not attained to the democratic conditions which exist in Australia—freedom of thought and action? And it all fits in with development? I mean that whereas means for expansion and development on the part of our

smaller people is lacking, and the traditions and customs and prejudices of the English people are a bar to progress, so, until this state of affairs is altered, we will not become democratic ? ”

Billjim : “ In my humble opinion, that is so. This is essentially a capitalists’ country. Why, you must have money in order to secure a decent education in Great Britain. In Australia you can go through any University or even the Royal Military College and graduate with honours in whatever profession you adopt, providing you have the brains. Lack of money is no barrier, because there are many forms of Scholarships which can be won in the State Schools by children of the working men, and which entitle the youngsters to attend a Secondary School, and later a University, and the State provides living expenses for such Scholarship winners, which permits them to attend the University without any other financial assistance.”

Hostess : “ But you have class distinction in Australia, surely ? ”

Billjim : “ Certainly we have. But it is not quite so hide-bound—no, I’m sorry, that’s a bit rough—I mean it’s not so exact as in England. Brains count for something, so does education and ability. The mere possession of wealth, especially if it is inherited, unless its owner is doing something better than just spending it in society, does not bring him the respect some English people might imagine it should.”

Hostess : “ And I’ve noticed that you Australians seem to feel very little embarrassment when you are admitted into English country-houses ; yet

you don't take advantage of such a situation to push yourselves forward. I like that; and it must be due to the fact that you take things at their face value. Bigness of thought again, isn't it? But then all your women-folk have a vote, and I expect that fact tends to produce freedom in thought and action too. But you are not allowed to discuss politics or Government while you are in the Army, are you?"

Billjim: "No."

Hostess: "That's certainly a pity in this case. So would you mind telling me something about your own early life?"

Billjim: "Not in the least. My father was a small wheat-farmer and I won a Junior Scholarship at the State School, which gave me a Secondary-school education, and then I started in to farm wheat, share-farming at first, with no capital, and gradually I got on, and now have a fair little wheat farm of twelve hundred acres."

Hostess: "And you had no financial assistance from your father at any time?"

Billjim: "No, not any."

Hostess: "That's worth knowing. And now you're in the Australian Army—even in that you get more pay than our boys, don't you?"

Billjim: "Our rate of pay runs from 6s. per day upwards. Privates get 6s., bombardiers 9s., and higher ranks—corporals and sergeants—get more, of course. You are only allowed to draw 2s. per day, if you are a private, 3s. being paid to an allottee in Australia or into your bank, and 1s. being deferred until you get your discharge.

That makes up the six ; but lots of our single fellows have the allotment money sent on to the bank in London from their own bank, and so they've always got money."

Hostess : " I'm really beginning to believe that your country after all has its advantages over ours for the less-moneyed classes."

Billjim : " Australia will always do me. It's a dinkum country."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE OLD HANDS

WE were back at the training battalion. As the weeks of training slipped by, the men began to harden properly, due to the climate and the strenuous physical exertion they were called upon to perform. But there was no noticeable slackness among those whose health was good. They fairly revelled in long route-marches, and took the keenest pleasure and interest in looking the soldier on every occasion. Also, snow had fallen, the first that many of the boys had ever seen, and this phenomenon interested them immensely. They delighted in the crisp, clear air and the beautiful whiteness of the surrounding landscape. It was good to be alive these days, when the bleak, cold winds had been replaced by gorgeous sunshine. Besides, on every parade or route-march it was a treat to see the manner in which each man acted, and pride in ourselves as a unit was steadily manifesting itself. We were beginning to excite most favourable comment among men of other units and among various officers.

Not far from our camp was a depot wherein drilled and trained the men who had been to France but had returned to England with a "Blighty" or some form of sickness, and now had been discharged from hospital and were getting set in condition for a further spell of fighting. These men were more or less damaged goods, that is, they had gone through the mill and come out of it with a "mended" physique, or their keenness for active service had diminished by reason of their personal experiences in the front line.

To compare a company of these men with a reinforcement company from the training battalion, whether on a route-march or during ordinary training stunts, meant a certain win for the "recruits."

The latter were fresh troops who had been inculcated with the desire to excel in the work they were called upon to do, and their confidence in themselves was boundless. So it was with some astonishment that they discovered a noticeable slackness about these seasoned warriors who had seen the real thing and knew war of to-day. Not only the men, but the N.C.O.'s of the Overseas Battalion, as they were called, were slack, and seemed to resent smartness in any of the new units in training.

This was often demonstrated when one of their companies or platoons happened to be halted for a "Smoke-o" in the vicinity of a "recruit" company that was resting on a route-march. Much banter would be exchanged, with not a little bitterness on both sides, but underlying it all was the covert atmosphere of experience which exuded

from the ranks of the veterans, and which naturally translated itself into a scornful, superior, and somewhat patronizing attitude towards the "new" men from Aussie. So prevalent was this among the old hands that not a few of the younger new hands at first felt themselves to be fools and infants, and that to cling to their military pride or to display any sort of enthusiasm for any kind of soldiering was to demonstrate direct evidence of being a greenhorn or mother's darling.

Picture a reinforcement company halted on the side of a snow-covered lane. The men are in great "nick" and have just marched the last three miles of a route-march in fifty-five minutes, with packs up. The majority are sitting on their packs, smoking, and all have that healthy look which is invariably associated with a life in the open. Animated discussion is in progress amongst various groups. Some are criticizing units they had seen on the roads; others are remarking upon the noticeable difference in the staying-power of their own unit to what it was shortly after landing in England, and pride in their improved physical and general military ability is most apparent. Presently the leading fours of a column of infantry swing into sight, quite a short column, with the first six or seven fours in step with the officer in front. As the approaching body moves into full view it is noticed that several different steps are in use throughout the remainder of the column—some men in various fours hopelessly out of step with each other, and the general aspect of the entire body is that of extreme boredom.

Then comes the inaudible order "Halt" from the officer in front, and "Fall out on the right of the road—keep off the road!" The column has practically broken up before the sentence is finished, because anticipation becomes a habit with old soldiers. The men seat themselves upon their equipment, some even lying back full length upon their packs, and others come over to the reinforcement, partly out of curiosity, and partly to lord it over the greenhorns.

"Good day, diggers," a "First Divvie" man from the Somme exclaims, as he stands or sits close to a number of the new boys. "How're yer doing?"

"Good day, mate," several voices reply. "How're things?"

"Up to—no blanky bon, diggers; this messing round and friggin' about with a blanky pack up—if they'd give us more bomb and machine-gun stuff, an' teach every man to work a Fritz machine-gun an' Fritz grenades, instead o' walkin' an' drillin' the tripe outer us, it might do some good."

"But yer gotter be in condition, 'aven't yer, mate? an' yer can't tell me that these marches and the physical jerks don't do no good that way?" A burly Lismore dairy-farmer with an aggressive jaw had taken up the cudgels against the "old hand."

That worthy grinned maliciously and looked about with an air of worldly wisdom.

"Course you'd know?" he replied. "Youse blokes give me a pain in the guts. Yer come over 'ere—kinder late like, an' before yer cut yer milk

teeth yer know all about the blanky war an' 'ow it's ter be won."

"Well, there isn't any need to sling off, cobber," another of the reinforcement chips in quickly. "We came over after we knew what the thing meant, and knew what we were in for when we volunteered. Not like a lot of you blokes, who took it on because you thought it was going to be a picnic—like the South African War, only over in a few months."

"Hear, 'ear. Hear, 'ear," from some of his mates.

The "First Divvie" man was momentarily crushed by this new point of view, but almost at once rallied himself.

"Anyway," he remarked, "yer can't say yer know much about the game yet. Wait till yer get a gut-ful of Somme mud an' continual shell-fire an' dirty Fritzes—an'—an'—chats, then ye'll know. Oh, hell, yes, then ye'll know."

"But straight, mate," the Lismore man asked, "wot's wrong with the system of trainin' we're doin' now?"

"Oh, there's nothin' much wrong with it. I s'pose it's necessary, an' all in the game, but wot narkes hell outer me is that so few of our blokes can work Fritz's typewriters an' bombs, an' everybody should know that. Why, it's only a few special trained Lewis gunners that can work our own Lewis guns, an' a man's gone to the mountains sometimes, if 'e's got one of them things an' can't work it, not knowin' it."

"But that'll all come in time. The 'eads can't

do everything at once. And we know wot we can do."

"Course yer do, an' yer'll soon learn. An' yer'll learn that bein' smart over 'ere is the 'all-mark of a mug. Wotter we got ter be smart fer? As soon as a bloke shows that 'e's keen on drill an' that, 'e's shot across ter France fer cannon-fodder. An' after yer've been there once, unless yer one of them rare blokes wot never gets the wind up, ye'll not be quite so anxious to get back ter Fritz again. This soldierin's a mug's game."

"You been at it a long while?"

"Oh no, nothin' much. But I was in the landin' at Gallip, an' been fightin' more or less in France ever since we left the Peninsular. All through that Pozières stunt, an' a raid or two, an' then Flers—a matter uv over two years since I left with the battalion."

"Been wounded?"

"Got my third 'issue' on the Somme last September."

"You've certainly had a fair go, mate, an' yer get——"

"Yer get so full-up of the game that yer try every stunt yer know to swing the lead and keep outer France. Do yer blame a bloke?"

"No, you've done your bit, mate. Expect we'll know all about it soon enough."

"Yes, an' I wouldn't rush it if I was you. I lorst too many of me mates ter wanter go back. If I could dig myself in in some cushy job in Blighty, I'd be satisfied to stop 'ere fer the duration. An' another thing that makes me wild, is seein' so

many blokes in good jobs over 'ere that never seen France yet. Look at the M.P.'s! Lots of 'em been 'ere since they left Egypt, an' yer can't be on leave a day without some big buckshee Lance-Jack John who's never seen any fightin' must come up and chip yer about a button undone, or ter see yer pass."

"I suppose that's why you chaps get into holts with them—you don't like them ordering you about under the circumstances?" a recruit inquired. "I could quite understand that."

The "First Divvie" man smiled.

"It's only nachural," he said. "But every bloke wot comes away from Aussie oughter see some fightin', don't yer reckon? Oney some of the diggers wot's been over and back like meself sorter thinks that a lot of youse blokes enlist late, hopin' the war'll be over by the time yer get to France."

Several reinforcement men jumped to their feet at this, uttering deep threats against anyone who would make such a statement to their faces.

"Yer don't need ter get excited," warned the "First Divvie" man. "I ain't sayin' it. I'm only tellin' yer wot others say. But I'll say this about yer—I'd sooner go into another big stunt with you blokes wot is fresh to it all than I would with a mob wot's been over the top before. Well, so-long, I see my lot fallin' in—we do nothin' but fall in ever since we enlisted, seems ter me. So-long!" And the war-weary philosopher joined his column.

As it passed the reinforcement, satirical advice was hurled from its ranks to the "new" men.

"Hey, diggers, don't forget to take smelling-salts to France. The dead Huns smell awful."

"Hey, cock, the Boche doesn't shoot if yer've got tailor-made clothes—he does a swap."

"Wot, is conscription a cert, then, for Aussie?"

"You'll miss yer mummie."

"Look at all the pretty soldiers, dear."

"Ow's our 'arbour, digger? Still there?"

"The Yarrer dried up yet?"

When the "old hands" had marched away, the reinforcement company fell in in its fours and continued its march. There had been food for thought in the remarks made by the "First Divvie" man, and the outstanding item which continually thrust itself before the minds of those who had heard it was the statement, "I'd sooner go into another big stunt with you blokes wot is fresh to it all than I would with a mob wot's been over the top before."

"An' what did 'e mean by 'chats,' Fred?" inquired an innocent lance-corporal of a friend alongside.

CHAPTER XIX

ABOUT VARIOUS THINGS

AMUSEMENTS, and the means whereby the hours between tea and "lights out" could be pleasantly spent, were not lacking to the boys.

"Wet" and "dry" canteens in the lines catered for the inner man, and inside games, a piano, and reading and writing materials were available for their amusement in the canteen buildings.

Then there was the Australian Y.M.C.A. Hut, where one could procure everything except intoxicating liquor, and this building was invariably crowded each evening with Australian and Imperial soldiers of the various units located in the vicinity.

Here you would often meet men you had not seen for years, and many joyful reunions and friendships were resumed in this way. Also, numbers of new friendships were commenced, especially between the Australians and the English troops. It was a very ordinary sight to witness an Australian Tommy and an English Tommy go off together to the former's hut, where there would be photos and other intimate and interesting things to show, and

the "Orstralian's" pride in his people and his country would be evident by the exultation in his voice. In such a way the soldiers from the British Isles would get a very valuable insight into what it meant to be a resident of the great Commonwealth.

"But you fellows seem to be so different to us—you're all hefty, and a lot of you are pretty wild. You don't seem to have much discipline. How's that?" the Englishman would inquire.

The Australian, as a rule, is not good at expressing himself, and after a pause the reply would come slowly, and every sentence thought out before it would be uttered, because he does not allow himself spontaneity of speech unless he knows his man.

"It isn't a thing I've thought about. But if we are bigger built than you blokes, I suppose it's 'coz we—most of us—live away from big cities, and everybody goes in for sport an' all that; plenty of ridin' an' walkin' an' swimmin' and football an' hard work. Most of us are off the land, cockeying,¹ and the blokes who come from the cities, Sydney and places like that, they all go in for surfing an' all kinds of sport. An' we always have plenty of good tucker an' don't have to work in fact'ries all day long like some of the Tommies here, and I s'pose we get more developed. When I was a kid I 'ad ter walk three miles ter school an' three miles back, every day. Anyhow, yer'll find that nearly every Aussey can ride or swim well, an' they're not duds when it comes to nearly any kind of sport."

Then would come an animated discussion about the various championships held by Australians and

¹ Farming.

Englishmen, the Aussey displaying what seems to his companion a wonderfully intimate knowledge of all the different heroes and heroines he would enumerate.

"You take swimmin'," he would say, "look at the records of Barney Kieran, Annette Kellerman, an' Fanny Durack. Hard to beat, eh? Fanny's record over 440 yards is 6 minutes 39²/₅ secs. And in boxin', 'Snowy' Baker among the amateurs, and Les Darcy among the pros. Take jockeyin', and you've got Wootton, and in amateur rowing you've got Cecil M'Villy, and Brooks for tennis. Then we got a fair crowd of good axe-men and rough-riders."

"Yes, you're well represented in the world of sport, you fellers," the Englishman would say, "but how do you account for bein' so undisciplined?"

"Only that in Australia we are more independent, mate. Most everybody's as good as the next bloke, an' it strikes some of the fellers that to give-in quickly rather than get crimed is a sign of no guts. An' we don't take so much for granted as you blokes do. It's much harder for us to s'loot every officer we see than it is for you, 'coz we sorter feel we're as good as some of the dags¹ that wear stars, an' you blokes seem to remember to do wot yer told without thinkin'. Course we s'loot officers on parade or on duty, an' our own officers when we see them, but this everlastin' s'lootin' in the streets gets us fair narked."

By this speech the Australian really meant to imply that the lack of discipline among his brethren

¹ An unusual individual—a freak.

was due to the possession of individualism and initiative among them, and the absence of any material fear of consequences through a natural ability to assimilate punishment—to the possession of stout hearts. He also implies that the Australian soldier's moral courage is not nearly so high as it might be. Upon due reflection this would strike one as being very true, and would partially account for those whose early training had been strict, going the pace when away from any paternal influence. Also to the lack of moral courage would be credited the almost universal habit among our boys of punctuating nearly every sentence with useless and often obscene adjectives.

"The majority of yer own blokes ud poke it at yer, they'd keep on, 'slingin' off,' if yer tried to be different from the [mob," is what a Billjim would say.

Vaudeville shows, cinemas, and concerts were available to the boys every night after the evening meal. These would be held in small theatres, halls, and Y.M.C.A. or Church Army Huts close to the training battalion, those held under the auspices of the two latter institutions being free. Also there were various boxing contests staged among the troops, which were always well attended.

The adjacent villages and small towns within a radius of five miles from the training-area continued to receive their quota of Australians every evening, some of them to sit in Ye Old English Inn parlour and absorb "bitters," and others to go off in quest of the elusive English damsel. The town of Salisbury—or is it a city?—with its famous cathedral

and its numerous girls, also acquired a certain popularity as a desirable rendezvous for week-ends.

Some seven weeks after our arrival on Salisbury Plain, the work of outlining a huge map of Australia on the downward slope of a hill, close by, was commenced. The coastline was secured by removing the turf and thus exposing the white chalk of which the hill is composed. The task was undertaken by an Australian officer and a few voluntary helpers, and when completed it formed a most unique and striking example of Australian advertisement. The colossal size of the map can be gauged when a rough estimate would give the width of coastline as approximately 10 yards, and the length of the map almost 200 feet. And it is likely to remain a landmark for centuries to come.

At the end of our second month of English training, all the various departments of our work had been completed, and practically every man of our own reinforcement had passed the necessary tests required to fit him for a draft going overseas. About this time, also, those of our N.C.O.'s who had gone to special schools of bombing, musketry, etc., had returned to the unit. At any moment now, we might be notified to go on leave for the four days which is granted to every reinforcement before it departs for France. Ere this welcome notification was handed to us, however, we witnessed the departure of a draft for France from a neighbouring battalion. The men were equipped with the full kit of the fighting infantryman, with the exception of rifles, grenades, tin hats, and gas masks, and we

cheered lustily, as did everybody else, when they marched out behind their battalion band.

The next day our own battalion colours were issued to us, and the battalion tailor received a slight remuneration from each man for stitching them on. This wearing of colours was, to a lot of the boys, the great thing for which they had been waiting. Now they could swank about like any "old hand," and few people would be the wiser. Pay for stitching them on? Rather! And how they had envied the men who had returned to Australia from the Front during the days after enlistment—those tried men who advertised their experience by the wearing of their units' colours.

Now, no matter what happened—even if they returned to Aussie at once, they would be able to exhibit the hall-mark of a "man who's been there." That night, in the huts, there was much joking and good-humoured banter between shearers, navvies, clerks, farmers, tradesmen, and all the various types of Australians who compose an infantry reinforcement. One man—a solicitor—would say to his pal—a farmer :

"Now I'm a 'dinkum.' If you see me in London, talking to some nice girl, for goodness' sake don't come up and say, 'Well, Ted, looking forward to your baptism of Hun-chasing next week?'"

"What? You'd kid a poor girl that you'd been there? Now, dinkum, would you really do that?"

"I mightn't say so, but—well—I—it would all depend upon the sort of girl I was with, Hayseed. I wouldn't tell her I was a cockey from Aussie just come to see the sights of Lonnon at my country's

expense. The London girls are too shrewd for a man to confide in."

Thus the discussion would turn to the subject of leave, and all manner of places would be mentioned, the majority favouring London, however, because they had never been there and had heard so much about it as an attractive place. Others, who expressed the intention of going elsewhere, were men who had relations in those places.

"We'll see something of life before we go across to push up daisies," a man in favour of London remarked.

The following morning it was definitely announced through Battalion Orders that the King would inspect the troops of the area on a near date.

The few days intervening were spent in perfecting every platoon, company, and battalion in "review" movements, and it was during this process that our fellows finally established a reputation for being the smartest and best-drilled unit in the area. This news, now officially confirmed, cemented the feeling of confidence which had previously existed, and the men, recognizing that each and every one of them was in a way responsible for such a pleasant report, felt a personal affection for each other and a natural regard and *esprit de corps*. This was most healthy and was more fully realized by those who survived the first engagement after a week in France, which was at no distant date.

Quite a number of our chaps had never seen the King, and there was obvious disappointment among them that he should be so small in stature and so worn of face. Some, indeed, could hardly realize

that the little man in khaki who looked over them as he passed was the greatest sovereign in the world. But there was no sign among them of anything but a splendid reverence toward him; and not a few realized that his was no enviable position during these times of stress and trouble. The bearing of the troops on parade, when every man did his best to make each review movement a spectacle for admiration, was partly accentuated by the men's martial British spirit, and partly by their wholesale love of their own country, and the desire to uphold Australia in the very best possible way. Also, their people at home would no doubt see them in photos and "at the pictures" on some future date, and they must have no cause to be disappointed at their bearing. So the King's review of Australian reinforcements on Salisbury Plain that day was a decided success, and when it was all over, as the battalions marched back to their respective training-areas, there was an undercurrent of feeling amongst them of stern loyalty to the flag which they had come so far to defend.

That evening after parade had been dismissed, and just as the boys were forming up to march into the dining-hall for tea, a heavy storm of snow swept down upon the area and spread a mantle of pure white over everything.

"I love all this," a Cornstalk remarked jubilantly, as he emerged from the dining-hall after the meal. "It makes everything so clean—covers up all the mud and makes everything so white and pure! Just like a bloke who's been wearing dirty singlets and that for weeks, and then has a bath and a

change into new white clobber¹ from the laundry. What about snowballin' the blokes as they come out? We'll put up a barrage!"

And so commenced a snowball fight, which increased to a perfect battle as one by one fresh men joined in, and laughter and good-natured adjectives were intermingled with the soft thud of crumbling missiles.

"'Struth! Just missed 'is beak."

"Look out, yer bein' outflanked, Bill."

"Blimey! Fair on the nut."

"Who's the cow that threw that? You B——"

"Hey, steady, three onter one—ugh!"

"Comin' over with the pin out, whish!"

And so the battle raged, and when the "ammunition" had well-nigh been expended in the vicinity of the dining-hall, and the participants filed into their huts, brushing the snow from their hats and tunics, it was just as though a crowd of boys had suddenly turned into big strong men. They were children every one of them, until it became necessary to play a man's part.

Round the tall circular stoves in the huts, the talk was all about the review and the imposing spectacle such a large collection of troops had presented, and every one felt pleased at the remarks which the colonel had made concerning the reinforcement's behaviour.

"I don't care what those returned blokes say," one man remarked, "it's only playin' the game to be smart an' orl that. Besides, we got ter go ter

¹ Clothes.

France, an' I'm sure no one wants to dodge that, so we're losin' nothin' by it."

"Well, anyway," another chimed in, "I'd sooner go with me mates here—all us what came over together—than with any other mob. Blimey, we got a bonzer lot of blokes, the best I been with yet, an' keen as blazes; an' look at the N.C.O.'s—not one of them a dud, an' all know their work backwards, an' all good blokes, dinkum white blokes."

"Yes," said the hut-commander, a corporal, "this lot 'll do me. And you remember that cove who said the other day that he'd sooner go over the top with us than with his own lot?"

"Yes, the Anzac bloke," from several listeners.

"Well, he knew what he was talking about, that bloke. Only he meant that us being fresh and new at the game wouldn't be as shy as some coves get after they've had a taste of heavy shell-fire. I was talkin' to a few blokes over from France, an' that's what they reckon. They say it's like a kid that doesn't realize the danger ahead. But they're not all like that, though. Anyhow, heavy shellin' and a lot of casualties would unnerve almost anybody."

"Oh yes, that's right," agreed the first speaker. "But I tell yer straight I'd sooner have a bloke with me in the front line that knew the game from experience than one who was new at it. Yer see, they know wot to expect—wot the Hun will do an' all that. Course I might be wrong, but that's how I feel. Funny, yer know, those blokes 'ud sooner have us and some of us 'ud sooner have them."

Thus, as the time drew on towards the hour when these boys must take the first really dangerous step in the Great Adventure, so did they allow themselves periods of serious thought and discussion on all it may portend. And although they knew that it was solely a matter of luck if they should survive one step after another, there was not any misgiving about their ability to play the game and stick it out, nor was there any sign of nervous apprehension that they might be stricken down into the dust from which there is no earthly return.

CHAPTER XX

ON LEAVE TO LONDON

LEAVE !
Everybody had been fixed up. Passes and railway tickets had been issued, and all moneys due to date had been paid each man.

There remained only the march to the station, and the railway journey to London, where at A.I.F. Headquarters in Horseferry Road would be issued final instructions, before dismissal would be granted.

As we swung out briskly along the ideal road which led to the station, with the clear morning air filling our lungs and the brightness of anticipation in our eyes, it seemed to us that life was indeed good, and that, all being well "at home," the gods could give us nothing better than this peep into the joys of London, about which we had heard so much during the last few days.

Every man was in perfect health now, and it seemed as though we had forgotten something, so buoyant was our step, and the pace was very solid. Then it was realized that we had no equipment

beyond a rolled great-coat, a belt, and a haversack, nor would we wear such abhorrent appendages during the next four days, anyhow ; and there would be no reveille and no orderly-sergeant or other N.C.O. to yell "Come on, show a leg there," in the grey dawn of the next few mornings. Yes, life was very good. The order "March easy" was given soon after we started, and although cigarettes were lit and a buzz of conversation broke out immediately, there was no "let-up" in the pace of any four in the column.

After an exchange of intentions re spending of time in London, and jocular remarks and suggestions relative to the most popular attractions to be met with in the "big smoke," the column broke into song, and right on into the small station the inhabitants on either side of the road were entertained with melodies which have become recognized marching songs in every country where British soldiers are fighting for their freedom and their King.

The day being one of sunshine and blue sky, the ever-changing panorama through which we sped in smooth, silent-running coaches on the railway journey to London, was greatly enjoyed by every one. This was the first opportunity the men had had for any extensive observation of England's rural lands, and it interested them immensely, especially those who were farmers in civil life. What a difference did this English farming country present, when compared with the wheat-belts of Australia. Here was a continuity of green meadows, hedges, and fallow lands, with their grey or white-

washed stone and brick cottages, and groups of pine and other evergreen trees scattered about on hill and dale. This was in marked contrast to the melancholy-looking stretches of ring-barked and dead box trees and the miles of ploughed land and barb-wire fences which are the features of most Australian farming country. Some of the men, who before enlisting had been engaged in extensive ploughing operations, were amused at the small size of the English fields.

"Fancy ploughin' this paddock," one observed. "You'd be all the time turnin' on the head-lands, an' I don't suppose they use six and eight furrow ploughs here either. Sparemedays, it's different to Aussie, where yer hitch in yer teams at daybreak at one end an' have yer lunch when yer reach the other. An' a bloke 'ud miss the cheeky magpies an' the rotten crows, an' the larfin' jackass jeerin' at yer from some tall gum or dead tree. Gordstruth! Farmin' 'ere ud be a kid's job, an' a man could have his missus come out from the little thatched house about every hour or so ter see that he wasn't wasting his time talkin' and varnin' ter the missus nex' door."

So the good-natured criticism went on as the train carried us through one county and then another, the men displaying an amused but kindly tolerance for the small scale of "cockeysing" with which they were being acquainted.

"But it's pretty, all right!" remarked a wool-teamster and bullocky. "Fancy this in the summer, when everythin' is pretty an' green, an' the 'awthorn 'edges is all out in bloom, an' the

poplars on the road-side is all out in leaf, and 'ere an' there creeks an' willers, and the orchards all over the place. Get me with me bullocks haulin' a load uv wool on that road yer can see there, an' me ole dorg runnin' under the waggon. No gettin' bogged in heavy sand or in the black-soil country like we got at Emu Plains about this joint. My oath, it 'ud be dead easy teamin' on this country."

"Yes, an' they don't have no drought in this country," another, an up-country blacksmith, broke in. "Here, where everythin's the same, year after year, an' buyin' stock 'ud be no gamble. Take an ordinary drought in N.S.W., with the sun so hot yer carn't touch anythin' made uv metal, an' there's nothin' but a shimmer of heat over everythin', an' it makes yer eyes that sore yer got ter keep 'em screwed up. And the thousands uv acres uv crop all yellin' an' dyin' fer want uv rain, and the miserable skinny sheep tryin' ter keep alive on sun-baked and scorched ring-barked country, with the blarsted measly crows cawin' an' cryin', waitin' ter pick their eyes out soon as they get down ter it."

This typical picture, so crudely drawn, enthused another soldier in the compartment—a mechanic and machinery "expert," to speech.

"Dinkum," he said. "You make me feel I'm back among the gums and the wattle again, Bill. Then there's the good season, yer know, when harvestin' is on. I remember when I used to go out among the cockeys adjusting their harvesters and headers, how the sight of a good harvest would make me feel that Australia was a damn fine country. On a good farm there'd be anything from twelve

hundred to three or four thousand acres under wheat—some of it share-farmed, and the sight of dozens of harvesters working and keeping close together in the one paddock was worth seeing. And all around nothing but a sea of ripe wheat. There'd be the buzz and hum of the machines, and a cloud of dust following each harvester, and a cloud of flies around every driver. And the bag stitchers working at the filled bags as they're unloaded. The dogs asleep under the waggons or anywhere where they can escape the sun's rays, and only waking to bark at an agent or some one moving from the machines every now and again. Lord, it does make a bloke home-sick to think of it—and the agent out to see the boss about buying the wheat. Then after harvesting is over, if it is not too hot, there'd be socials and dances at the big cockeys' places, and fellows would ride in from anywhere up to twenty miles around to have a hop and see all the sheilas.¹ It used to amuse me, too, to see farmers' sons sitting on their heels for hours, yarning among each other about all the various phases of farming. But it takes grit to go on the land in Aussie, because you're up against the risk of bad seasons—fire, hail, and drought—from the time you get the crop in. And when you're breaking in new country it means solid work and long hours—clearing, burning off, and ploughing. No kid's job."

"Oh, shut up, you: I'll be howlin' directly," said a young farmer in the corner, his eyes agleam with amusement and appreciation. "Only just to think

¹ Girls.

two years ago that I'd be off my selection and touring London at the expense of the Government, like we are doin' now. But I'm not a bit sorry, so long as the young brother can carry on while I'm away, and it does a bloke a power of good ter travel and see other countries' methods. From what I have seen, we ain't too slow in old Aussie."

A shearer and general bush hand who had humped his swag from the Northern Territory to the South Australian border, and knew all the "ration routes" in between, now spoke up eagerly, as one who thoroughly knows the subject upon which he is going to discourse.

"Not one of you coves got anything to say about my game in Aussie, an' what it's like ter see a dinkum shed at work," he said. "Thirty shearers an' machines workin' along the board, all stripped to the waist, an' goin' fer the lick uv their blanky lives. An' the hot smell uv sheep an' wool an' tar, an' the yappin' uv the dorgs outside as they keep draftin' fresh mobs an' that. An' the frizzlin' heat, if we are late in the season. An' p'r'aps the owner uv the station 'll drive over with some boshter girls who been stayin' at the homestead, an' they'll come trippin' along the board, steppin' over the fleeces in their dinky little shoes an' stockin's yer can fair see through, an' as they stop about yer pen or pass yer, yer nearly cut yer sheep, 'coz yer tryin' ter sniff up every bit uv the boshter scent wot they smells of. An' yer looks at them out uv the corner uv yer eye, not likin' ter look at them full, 'coz yer so blanky greasy, an' yer shearin' ter

beat the ringer,¹ an' yer watchin' fer him ter get bad sheep an' that."

"And I suppose some of the ladies ask silly questions?" a man inquired.

The shearer laughed.

"My oath, sometimes," he replied. "I remember one lot—they wuz from Gov'ment House or some kind uv big toff's house around Sydney—we wuz shearin' on one uv Sam M'Caughey's places in the Riverina—an' they come alorng ter see us workin'. I 'appened ter be ringer every day since we started, an' the ole bloke—ole Sam—'e stopped the nice young things at my possi,² an' after they'd 'ad a good eyeful, one fluffy piece says ter me—lookin' at me through a couple of little round winders held on a stick, says she: 'How many of the poor things do you shear every day?' 'About a dozen, miss,' I says. 'Oh, but that's a lot, isn't it?' she says. 'You must feal feahfully tired.' Now that's dinkum, an' me shearin' 230 every day, with fair sheep. And I'm nearly larfin', an' wot with the dainty fillies all lookin' I cut me sheep an' called for tar. This clina she gives a little gasp like an' says ter me, 'Oh, how cruel! The poor thing! Will it die now?' And fair dinkum she kinder shuddered an' turned away, and then ole Sam 'e moves 'em alorng, seein' they is keepin' me back."

"I know you do meet funny experiences on some of the stations," said the machinery expert. "Reminds me of a yarn I once heard when I was out Delinaquin way, fixing up the machines on a big

¹ The shearer with the best tally.

² Position.

run where shearing was in full swing. There was a dag of a bloke there—a wool-classer, who used to spin some great yarns and this is one of them. 'One day,' he said, 'a new chum chap just out from England got a job as a jackeroo, and we were mustering at the time. So the boss, he drives him out two or three miles to where a few studs were waiting to be brought in for shearing, and shows him the flock—about 2300, and which gates he must drive them through, to the shed, as they are to be in the pens next day. So early next morning the new chum starts out; he wouldn't ride any of the station horses as they were nearly all buck-jumpers, and walks to the studs, and he wouldn't have dogs either, as he'd no idea how to work them, and the boss had impressed upon him not to knock the sheep about and not to let any get away. So eventually he gets them all moving, and after they'd been travelling about fifteen minutes, a yellow-looking small one without much wool breaks out of the flock and goes hell for leather on the back track again. Course the new chum gets after him and after a long run manages to turn him back to the flock, and they all got going after he'd rounded the stragglers. But later on the yellow one streaks round the side of the mob and away once more, and the Englishman after him. This time he runs him down when they had both done an hour's marathon, and by this time the studs have spread all over the place and he had a hell of a job to get them all together again, and they're all knocked up by the time they get to the shearing shed. The boss, he comes out and sees all his studs had been raced

or something—they were panting and had their mouths open, and he turns to the new chum and roars him up for not coming along quietly. And the young feller looks him straight in the eye and says, "I had to." Then he points to the edge of the flock. "See that little yellow one?" he says. "I had to run him down three times, and while I was mustering him back to the flock the others would wander. So I couldn't help it, really." "What! You mustered *that*?" gasped the boss. "Of course I did. You said not to let any get away." "Yes, you fool, but *that's* a hare! I'll go hoppin' to hell! And you actually *yarded* him!" " " "

After the amusement had subsided somewhat, the blacksmith ventured a remark to his shearer companion :

"You blokes, a lot of yer, earn good money shearin'—gettin' 28s. a hundred and shearin' over two hundred every day; that's three quid a day, and yer not cut out till yer've worked six to eight weeks on the one shed, and then yer git yer cheque an' bust it up in a few days at some back-block pub an' drink yerselves inter the horrors. Then yer humps yer bluey agin an' knocks up another cheque."

"Well," replied the shearer, "we ain't all like that: only some does that; but yer soon take a jerry ter yerself." He looked out of the window. "Blimey," he exclaimed, "we're gettin' near London. Where're all youse blokes goin' ter stop?"

CHAPTER XXI

LONDON. LEARNING LIFE

A GUIDE from headquarters met the reinforcement and conducted it to Horseferry Road, where the necessary preliminaries were undergone before the men found themselves free. But even the short march to headquarters was not without its attractions to those men who had never seen London before. They were interested in everything, especially the Underground, and could as yet only vaguely grasp at ideas, like a small child when it is led by the hand through a large town for the first time.

The swarms of Ausseys to be seen about A.I.F. Headquarters at once cheered them and then mystified them. There seemed to be battalions of sturdy men here, who looked happy and contented and smug. And all seemed to be attached to headquarters. Besides, there were countless Australian M.P.'s, and each looked as though he was wondering by what right any ordinary reinforcement man should be on the earth. The smug confidence of *some* men in their "cushy" jobs!

London is fraught with many forms of danger to

the uninitiated Australian who is about to spend a "leave" period in the city. In order to acquaint the boys with the various risks and temptations that should be avoided if they desire to remain healthy, the authorities compel every reinforcement unit to attend a lecture given by the M.O. at headquarters, before they are finally dismissed for leave. The "brotherly advice" which each man receives in this way is of great value, and, while there will be a few scoffers in almost every draft of men, the majority feel that henceforth they must blame themselves alone should they stray from the road which is pointed out as the only safe one in a city which is so full of hidden perils.

After listening intently to the advice of the medical officer, we were informed that, on completion of our four days' leave, we would report independently to the training battalion on the Plain.

It was thought that some Y.M.C.A. or other official would advise us as to the most suitable places at which we could stay while in London ere we were dismissed. This anticipation was correct, for the military authorities had no sooner done with us than there appeared an Aussey Y.M. officer, who gave us a brief insight into what the Australian Y.M.C.A. was prepared to do in order to help the boys spend a pleasant and wholesome leave. We could, he said, be welcome guests at private English homes in and about London or any part of England, or make the Aldwych Theatre our headquarters and participate

in the various forms of amusement provided, such as sight-seeing parties, tennis and dancing and river picnic parties, free theatres, and a host of other attractive features which the Aussey Y.M. could arrange at any time. Then we were told the names and locations of the various Y.M.C.A. huts and hostels about London where we would get every convenience and consideration in regard to beds and meals, and as a last thing we were to remember that the Aussey Y.M. was in London for our special benefit and to make use of it at any and all times. "Then," said the Triangle man in the turned-up hat, "you will learn what a lot we can do for you and what a small amount of money you will spend."

"P'rade—p'rade—Shun! Dis-miss!"

There are several different types of soldiers to be found in the Australian Imperial Force, and when a crowd of miscellaneous specimens find themselves each with four days' leave ahead, and anything from a fiver to fifty or a hundred pounds and even more to spend, then do the types become defined by the various ways in which they deport themselves during their sojourn in the big metropolis.

It is safe to say that as far as a reinforcement is concerned, the majority of the men, after repeated inquiry and much bewilderment as to direction, find themselves at the "Aldwych," the "Holborn Y.M.," or one of the other many clubs or hostels which are exclusively used for members of His Majesty's land and sea forces. Here they will secure a cubicle or bed for the four nights of their stay, deposit their luggage and superfluous money

or valuables in the safe keeping of the institution, and then wander out to see the sights profusely illustrated and described in the guide-books or "What to see in London" which are available for perusal at their temporary home. This type you could refer to as being "steady." Quite a number of them have transferred bank accounts of their own in London and therefore money is to a certain extent unlimited, for their personal use. At night they go to good restaurants and afterwards to the theatre, where they will invariably be found occupying quite expensive seats and thoroughly enjoying themselves like great big simple children.

Those of them who have a desire to glimpse into London's "smart life," or enjoy the novelty of rubbing shoulders with the various habitués of the fashionable restaurants, will enter these gilded halls of the epicure with the utmost sang-froid, and will betray not the faintest embarrassment should they find themselves, in their pleated tunics, about to dine at a table next to that at which some famous general is entertaining his guests. Of course there are exceptions to this rule.

One big son of the soil was taken out to dinner at the "Troc" on our first evening in London by a "cobber" whose earlier life had taught him the manners and customs of the "well-bred" people who eat expensive dinners at these institutions. The big farmer boy, whose previous experiences in associating with people of the smart type had been confined to elbowing his way through them in the saddling paddock

or enclosure of a race-course in Australia, found himself at a horrible disadvantage in his new surroundings ; and very reluctantly gave up his great-coat and hat to the gorgeously attired attendant in the big vestibule. His step was uncertain as he followed his "cobber" into the great grill-room—his "cobber" who was so unperturbed and so confident in his bearing.

The farmer boy looked about him nervously—one of those looks which take in everything and see nothing ; and somewhat bewildered by a vague impression of so many beautifully attired ladies dining with their officer friends, he sat down stiffly upon the chair which an obliging waiter had pulled out for him. Meanwhile his host had carelessly reached for his table-napkin and had begun to spread it over his left knee, at the same time glancing over the menu which the waiter had put into his hand. The farmer boy's eyes at this stage slightly resembled in expression those of a trapped animal, but he had sufficient gumption to note what his "cobber" was doing, and forthwith he, too, spread a napkin, but with clumsy fingers.

The host, a gleam of amusement in his eyes, handed the big menu-card across to his companion.

"You order the dinner, Bill," was what he said. "You know best what your favourite dishes are."

Bill opened the card nervously and was but half-conscious of his pal's languid action of selecting a cigarette from a silver case and lighting it with careless ease. Then his eye took in the fact that the

menu was printed entirely in French, and a hot wave of colour surged up to the roots of his hair, and to hide his embarrassment he accepted a cigarette from the case held out for him. "Gord-blarmey!" he muttered, a half-angry expression upon his face as he handed the menu back across the table. "This is no good ter me, George; I don't savvy that lingo." He really didn't know whether to be angry or not, and was certainly quite unconscious of the many admiring glances which starry-eyed damsels were flashing at this fine-looking and beautifully-proportioned big Australian. "You do the orderin', and help a bloke to put this thing through. I'm beat when it comes to this sort of game."

His pal smiled, quite a tender smile, exposing to view a row of superb white teeth.

"Right-o, Bill," he replied. "I'll order, then, and you watch the other people."

But Bill was not keen on watching the other people. Their glances in his direction disconcerted him extremely, especially those of the bare-shouldered ladies near him. His mind went back to his little old home in the western part of New South Wales's great wheat-lands, and he fervently wished that he was back there and just going in to eat a feed of roast mutton and boiled pumpkin in the weather-bound cottage which had sheltered him for the last twenty-two years. *There* he would know what to do. *There* he would feel at his ease, and not like a great calf in a drawing-room. And all this finery and swank! If his old toil-worn mother could only see him now. But it

was seeing life, and he'd have great stories to tell when he'd arrive back home.

The first course arrived. It was *hors-d'œuvre*. Bill, in front of whom a plate had been set, was about to wave the waiter back to George, so that his pal could be the first to help himself from the proffered dish of potato-salad. But a hasty glance showed him that George was busy looking at something—a sort of flat book—and not wishing to appear a fool in front of the waiter he helped himself liberally to the salad, as he was very hungry. And a moment later he was mechanically spooning on to his plate part of the contents of several other dishes which were being put before him. By the time the waiter had reached George's side, Bill had accumulated quite a pile of salad, various small fishes, olives and sliced tomatoes upon his plate, and now he was positively at a loss. There were quite seven or eight different pairs of bone-handled and silver knives and forks flanking his plate on both sides and he was not sure whether to use any special set or merely a fork or spoon.

"Sparemedays!" ejaculated Bill to himself. "Wot the 'ell do they use all this jewellery for?"

He was interrupted in his uneasy train of thought by his pal's voice.

"Will you have a 'gin rickie' or a 'sherry and bitters' for an appetizer, Bill?" and then the speaker noticed Bill's plate. "Good Lord!" he muttered, at the same time glancing about to see if Bill's *hors-d'œuvre* had attracted attention at adjacent tables. But apparently no one had

noticed anything unusual, and George, a tiny red glow suffusing his ears, helped himself moderately to the dishes in front of him.

"I'll 'ave a sherry-wine," said Bill, trying to look unconcerned, but finding it extremely difficult to dispose of his big hands. "What you drinkin'?"

"Oh, a gin Italian for a start," replied George. "Carry on, Bill, with the *first* course. Wha—what are you waiting for?"

"I'm waitin' fer you. 'Ow the 'ell do I know what tools ter use? *First* course, did yer say? Speedthacrows! I thought this was the main part uv the feed." Bill was shrewd enough to subdue his voice so that only his pal could hear.

"Never mind," said George. "Use these. You'll survive," he exclaimed laughingly, taking up his own "weapons" for the attack.

While they were waiting for the soup, Bill scanned the menu with interest. He was curious about the cost of what his pal would probably consider a "dinner." Then he gave a growl of astonishment and annoyance.

"If this don't beat cock-fightin'!" he exclaimed. "Half a nicker¹ fer what we've eaten already!"

"That's nothing, Bill. We don't get the chance to dine in London every night. I've ordered thick soup—tomato. You'll like it."

While the potage was being consumed—rather audibly on Bill's side—his friend, between spoonfuls, gave him a few hints on the modern etiquette of a diner, which rather mystified the big Cornstalk.

¹ Half a sovereign.

"There's a fair dinkum lot to learn, orl right!" he acknowledged. "But I couldn't hold my knife without gettin' a good grip of the handle an' me first finger pressin' down on the blade."

As, one by one, the various courses were served and consumed, it began to dawn upon Bill that it was no wonder they could have so many different dishes put before them during a complete meal.

"The measly little bit yer get, each time. Look at this pore little unprotected bit of a hen's chest, sittin' on the plate like a cough-drop on a gramophone record."

Wine was ordered—a large bottle of '59 Pommery, Bill's "Larger'll do me, mate," to the waiter having no effect upon that worthy, who was quietly and unostentatiously enjoying the entire proceedings.

When seven courses had been disposed of, and the wine, the music, the popping of champagne corks, and the gay laughter of the many diners had had their effect upon the big overgrown boy in the khaki-pleated tunic, he was beginning to realize that here was life; that, after all, this was something of which he had never even guessed, this subtle catering for the senses, and which infused into him a glow and a joy of living which was a delight and an ecstasy.

The two pals sipped their black coffee and languidly watched the blue wreaths of smoke which curled upwards from the glowing ends of their clear Havanas.

"I get yer now, Steve," murmured Bill, as, with

half-lowered eyelids, his gaze wandered to the occupants of adjacent tables. " You know, I like ter see all these bonzer tabbies blowin' the smoke from their classy little mouths. Blimey, I wish we knew some uv them—bonzer tarts ! "

CHAPTER XXII

LONELINESS. THE LONDON GIRL

INCLUDED in the type of "steady" men among the Australians who visit London are those who have friends or relatives living in or on the outskirts of the big city. These men are extremely lucky, because they can enjoy the almost forgotten delights of a domestic hearth and the continuous companionship of people of their own class or tastes. With their friends they go to all the good "shows" and frequently dine out, and never experience that horrible loneliness with which so many Australians become acquainted at some stage or other of their sojourn in the city.

This loneliness, about which much could be written, is but a natural sequence when a man who has all his life moved among friends and acquaintances finds himself thrust into the maelstrom of hurrying humanity which ebbs and flows through the myriad ways of a mighty city many thousands of miles from his native country. To some few, this step into a foreign world is always full of interest. There are so many new things to be observed—new customs, new people, new ideas.

And the mind is so busy tabulating its impressions that it has not time to miss an intimate companionship with another.

A very large majority of the Australians who visit London, even if it be for the second or third time, will experience the brand of loneliness which is far more acute than that produced by wandering alone far into the trackless bush. In the bush at least you are familiar with everything about you ; the birds, the animals, the trees, you know them all, and, while your ration lasts, there is no immediate anxiety, and you can camp wherever you choose. In London, everything is strange and new. The very walls of the buildings are sombre and cold-looking, and the thousands of people who are continually passing seem to emphasize the fact that you are not one of them. They go their way in twos and threes and fours, talking and laughing with the prospect of a pleasant evening among their fellow-creatures. Some are hurrying on alone, but they, too, are hurrying to others of their kind, and everybody seems more or less happy, except the lonesome Australian who is standing on the kerb wondering how he is going to spend the twelve hours which separate him from another day of visiting famous buildings and other unattractive things.

Perhaps you are a healthy, clean-living type of young Australian who has drifted away from your "cobbers" because their ways are not yours, and you prefer to be alone rather than spend your time walking with them up and down the Strand or mixing your drinks in a pot-house where the

female element is a characteristic feature of the place. Then your thoughts bring to mind a scene totally unfamiliar until you had come to England and visited some of the public houses of the small town near your training-area. This scene is the tap-room of an English public house, where you noticed with amazement that the girls of the lower classes came in and ordered their drinks with the same freedom as the men. At first you had mistaken these girls for the kind who earn their living on the streets, since in Australia the girl who drinks at a public house is seldom anything else. And then you are informed, upon inquiry, that it is a custom for certain classes in England to do this thing. But it shocks your senses, nevertheless, and slightly discounts the general respect with which you were prepared to behold all English women.

Reflecting upon these things, you take a sudden notion to spend an hour or two on the Underground, since it offers the attractions of bright lights, seats, and an everlasting current of new faces and types of humanity.

You purchase a ticket for Putney or Maida Vale—anywhere which will necessitate a series of changes from one Underground system to another. From the moment of securing your ticket at the Trafalgar Square Tube Station booking-office, your interest is claimed. With an inside feeling of uncertainty you follow the crowd along the various corridors—uncertainty regarding the correct route to be traversed to reach the right platform, though you allow no visible sign of this to reflect itself by your

bearing. After a series of turns, trips up or down in huge lifts, or ascent or descent by means of quaint moving stairs, you find yourself on a platform, and, still in doubt, you inquire of a youthful official if you are on the desired platform, as there is another just through a small subway behind you. Receiving an answer in the affirmative, with the information as to the station at which you must change, you are about to take stock of the people all round you, when your intentions are interrupted by a roaring sound and the appearance of an electric train emerging with terrific speed from the tunnel which leads into the station. Your impression is that the snake-like thing will overrun the station, but it stops flush with the end of the platform, amid much hissing of compressed air from the brakes.

Then you find yourself pushed and jostled through one of the gates of the train, and into a carriage, where you sit in one of the few empty seats available. But there are several ladies who find no seat unoccupied, so you promptly stand up and grab a strap, to let one of them have yours. Perhaps you are audibly thanked for this courtesy, and by a dainty damsel with a pretension to good looks. This latter fact you notice as your eyes sweep past her on a tour of inspection, and then you realize that she has smiled at you—just the tiniest, weeniest little smile that was evidenced by the almost imperceptible curves which appeared for a moment at the corners of her mouth. This, you reflect, is a smile meant for you alone ; by its very process was it hidden from other people, and, besides, her

eyes had looked into yours for a brief instant and their expression had told you that you were approved. You look at her again, furtively, because there are so many other pairs of eyes focused on your vicinity and you hate coarseness and ill-bred, vulgar curiosity. Your second glance reveals further charms—a neat costume and silk stockings, and you have learnt that her eyes are of the deepest blue. She is nursing a small attaché-case and you reflect that she must be in some office in the city and is going home from business. You resolve to make some inquiry of her, if opportunity offers, as to where you are to change for your ultimate destination, for you are curious to hear her speak and to know if she is not averse to chatting with you.

While you are wondering as to the likelihood of this girl being free for the remainder of the evening and the possibility or otherwise of her acceptance of your intended invitation to a theatre, your eyes encounter the profile of another damsel who is sitting some distance away reading from the pages of a book supported upon her attaché-case. You can see that her hair is a beautiful black, and that two fascinating curly fringes are protruding from beneath her neat little head-gear. Also, her profile is superb—a Greek profile, with just the suggestion of a dimple in cheek and smooth rounded chin. An overwhelming desire to see the eyes of this exquisite-looking girl at once assails you, and you move up a little towards her just as the train pulls in at another station.

You are now able to seat yourself on a seat some

distance from the object of your admiration, and on the opposite side, and you notice that she doesn't even bother to lift her eyes from the interesting book in front of her.

Then some people come in, and she looks up at the new arrivals, and you have just time to ascertain that her eyes are either a soft dark brown or a deep black before she lets the heavy black eyelashes once more descend and again becomes absorbed in her book.

You had seen enough, though, to set your pulses at a slightly faster pace, for the eyes which had taken in the fresh passengers had also observed you for the fraction of a second, and you knew that they were divine.

While the train whirls round bends and just manages to miss brushing the shining curved sides of the subway, you take in every exterior detail of the girl who has roused your interest to such a disquieting pitch. Her white brow is adorned with a pair of most ravishing black eyebrows, delicately arched, and her mouth is small and finely chiselled. She is wearing a heavy fur coat, from beneath which are revealed a glimpse of silk stockings and a pair of very small cloth boots. Altogether, you realize she is quite the prettiest and most attractive-looking specimen you have seen for years. But why *won't* she look up again? Hang the old book!

Some sort of telepathy must have conveyed your wish to the pretty one, for she looks directly from her book to you, takes you in at a glance, and resumes her reading after conveying to you by her

eyes that you are a person of no account—a presumptuous ass. At least that is how you feel, for you had noticed the faintest gleam of scorn in her expression.

“I suppose she thinks I’m just a rough sort of Aussey, not fit to associate with nice people,” is what you say to yourself. “Jove! I’d like to talk to her, and let her see——” And you reluctantly turn your attention to a diagram of the Underground which is looking down at you from the opposite side of the compartment. After observing the number of stations to pass before you have to get out, you again look at the black-haired girl, wondering at what station she might depart, and what her destination might be. Oh for a chance that it will be the same as yours and you might be able to inquire politely which is your next platform. Again she looks up, and this time she meets your gaze squarely. For a full five or six seconds she looks deep into your eyes and then hers drop, but this time there is a decided break in the weather. Those depthless orbs and the small sensuous mouth had wafted to you the tail-end of a most alluring smile. Gad! Now you must speak to her if it is possible without attracting attention; you simply must. And you decide there and-then to get out at *her* station, no matter where it may be. And of course she couldn’t snub you very severely, if you just asked her for directions—and besides—she had smiled.

At this stage of your cogitations you notice that several people have arisen and are making their way to the end of the compartment, and the next

moment you see that your divinity has also joined the throng at the doorway. So you get up briskly and move on with the crowd as the train draws up at the next stop, cursing under your breath the people who are between you and the small fur-coated form. Even after the waiting passengers have alighted and are hurrying along towards the stairs, or the elevators, you are still "some people" in rear of your objective, and just as you have managed to work your way to within a yard of her, those immediately in front have surrendered their tickets to an official at a small gate, and the next moment the girl has passed through. You fumble in your pockets for your ticket, but cannot find it, so you step aside to avoid obstructing others in rear, and a second later you have seen a small head turn for a brief instant and you are aware of a mischievous smile that is flashed at you as the girl disappears into the darkness beyond the station.

Thus, in a few seconds, can the sun of life, all shining and bright, be completely obliterated by the chance clouds of incident. This philosophy you realize as you stand forlornly inside the small wicket gate. "Yes," you reflect, "she is hopelessly lost, and all because I never thought of that damned ticket, or that one was wanted here, and of course any tiny delay and she gets out of sight. If I'd only had the thing ready—and by now she's somewhere—well—anywhere, and I've as much chance—oh, damn these blarsted ticket-collectors!"

So you eventually return by devious ways to

Trafalgar Square, via Putney. This long journey, necessitating much changing of trains, has given you time to reflect upon all manner of things which your evening's experience has brought to mind.

Beyond anything else you are filled with regret at missing the one girl you really wanted to know—just the type of girl you most admire—a faultless specimen of girlish charm, and she would have found you a man worth knowing and appreciating—an interesting and well-behaved man who understood something about women, and who was possessed of tact.

How you would have loved to have taken her to a good theatre, even to dinner at Prince's or the Carlton, where you would have talked to her about "life," and "temperaments," and your observations about the misunderstandings of the sexes. No doubt she would have been politely interested, and you would endeavour to so impress her with your personality that she might later agree to let you meet her people. And how proud you would be, if she permitted you to take her about should you return to London on some later occasion. Fancy holding that sweet girl in your arms, and being timidly allowed to kiss her.

But surely you might see her again, even though you have only two days left before your return to camp. Damn that ticket-collector and your own silly carelessness!

As you make the last change for Trafalgar Square, and take a seat in a smoker, another Australian—evidently a headquarters clerk—sits down beside

you. After borrowing a match, with the curt "Got a light, digger?" he enters into conversation.

"You on disembarkation?" he inquires. You answer in the affirmative, at the same time noting his well-cut tailored uniform and a smart "British Warm" carried over his left arm.

"This is some village, ain't it? I been here four months, across from France—up at Horseferry Road—in the pay office. Just goin' ter meet me tabbie at the Corner-House. This is a regular one, an' she's workin' late to-night, in a bank. I just been seein' another out Kensington way."

He goes rambling on, evidently aware of having a good listener, until at last you ask casually if the girls one sees going home from offices and such places are at all keen on talking to decent-looking Australians in the tubes or anywhere.

"Mostly," he replies. "But all the nice tabbies—those who are on the level—are sure to be booked up at least three or four evenin's ahead. An' there's one thing I'd give yer a tip about. Don't come at those who knock about the Strand. Yer never know wot yer up against. It's not like France, where yer know everythin's O.K. in the joints, 'coz uv the Government laws. But here! Straight wire, some uv our blokes, they 'ave come the proverbial, and——"

You interrupt him with a query as to what the Australian girl would think were she to know that her "boy" was one of those who associated with the painted creatures who promenade Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly.

" Oh, it's all in a lifetime—seein' life, an' w'en a bloke's been away from women fer so long, an' 'e knows that 'e's liable ter be snuffed out any time, well, little adventures like meetin' tabbies ain't much ter worry about. Course the Aussie girls—the dinkum ones—wouldn't know, but yer carn't expect a bloke away over 'ere with plenty uv dough not ter git gay when 'e's takin' a sportin' kind uv sheila about ter dinners an' theatres. Course there's lots uv our blokes that never have anythin' ter do with 'em, an' others agin who track with straight girls. Lots uv Ausseys get spliced to English tarts, an' they make good wives, 'coz they bin used ter little money and know the value uv savin' an' makin' a home. But, blarmey, there'll be some scratchin' when they all get back to Aussie."

Apropos of this last statement, there comes to your mind some verses you had seen in a recent Australian periodical, dealing with the Australian girl's point of view :

Yes, I know him—his spirit is willing,
And the flesh (it is written) is weak ;
If the girl sets a pace that is killing,
Then it's " Greek will be meeting with Greek " :
Of small use is my distant entreating,
When her eyes with the hot love-light shine,
When her heart close beside him is beating,
And her arms are around him—not mine.

So I sigh for my boy and I miss him—
My six feet of great brawny brown man,
But I cannot stand tip-toe to kiss him,
And the cat who is over there can.

Though I'm queen of his heart and it thrills me
With him always in spirit to be,
But—now this is the fact that annoys me—
The—the—other girl sits on his knee.

"Why is it," you ask your companion, "that Australians in London seem to be fairly popular with the opposite sex?"

"Money," he replies. "Yer see, we git much more'n the Tommies, an' we're bigger fools w'en it comes ter treatin' women with respect."

Before you can ask him to explain just what he means by his last words, your voluble fellow-countryman excuses himself and moves down into another carriage, where he at once becomes absorbed in conversation with some female acquaintance.

"Yes," you decide, "certainly some Australians are not troubled with scruples."

As you wend your way up from the Underground into Trafalgar Square, there steals upon you the loneliness of a man who is out of joint with everything about him. You ruminate upon this peculiar feeling of isolation which is gradually overtaking you, and after due consideration you find that it is sympathy which you most desire—the sympathy of a pair of soft arms round your neck and an understanding little soul to whom you can pour out all your troubles and doubts. This, you decide then, is the reason why so many Australians marry English girls. These men are caught on the rebound of a growing intimacy with some attractive charmer just when they are feeling all the pangs of a great vast loneliness, and the prospect of a helpmate who will ever be in sympathy with them and never so

far away that they will lose touch with each other, forms a circumstance against which they offer very little opposition. At this stage in your meditation you have reached Piccadilly Circus, walking aimlessly, and the lonely feeling becoming more pronounced as you realize that London is so big, so full of its own myriad little comedies and emotions of human existence that it holds no place or niche for you in the entire scheme of things, and that as a man with only a few days of leave it is impossible for you to satisfy that craving for companionship which is plunging you into a mood of the utmost dejection.

Just as you turn into Oxford Street, a group of two Australians and two girls talking together on the footpath compels you to hug the wall of a building in order to avoid colliding with them. The downward rays from an incandescent street-lamp light up their forms and faces so that every detail is plainly visible. With a suddenness that almost stops the beating of your heart, you realize that one of the girls is your black-eyed beauty of the Underground. Yes, there she is, still wearing her fur coat and neat little head-gear, and still carrying her attaché-case. You are not mistaken, because you would know those soft dark eyes and the beautiful profile anywhere.

Hardly conscious of anything but the near presence of the one girl you would be so proud to be seen with, you stop, undecided as to what you will do next, and then she speaks, addressing one of the rough-looking soldiers in the turned-up hat :

"Come along, dearie. Be a sport and come

home with me, and don't try to kid me you are broke——"

But you, the anguish of seeing a precious idol shattered at your feet, numbing your already dulled senses, have stumbled on into the great loneliness.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE "HARD-CASE" AUSSEY

THE "unsteady" type of Australian soldier who is on disembarkation leave in London is a totally different specimen to his more respectable brethren of the reinforcement.

He is the individual who has been largely responsible for the bad reputation which Australian soldiers have gained in many parts of England during the last two and a half years. And it is characteristic of him that on his return to England, from France, whether he be a "Blighty" or merely on furlough, his ruthless desires are given an even looser rein than were permitted them before he experienced the horrors of modern warfare.

But these instincts or weaknesses of mind do not in any way interfere with his ability as a fighter of high order. His very disrespect of codes and his complete indifference to consequences arising from his misdeeds suggest courage, which, when confronted with overwhelming odds and the possibilities of a violent death, will never wilt, but will grow to such proportions as to make him one of the most formidable of the Allied soldiers.

From his earliest recollection he has been a fighter. Born in some Australian city, of humble parents, he has had to keep his own end up through all the trials and tribulations which attend a youngster when he is learning life at the big city school and among the gangs of larrikins older than himself who dominate over their weaker brethren in every poor quarter of Australia's largest cities.

Step by step he has had to battle, to impose his growing personality and, by his close association with other boys of more advanced years who rob Chinamen's carts and otherwise conduct themselves like juvenile criminals, he, too, develops the tendency to do just what his baser instincts prompt, regardless of whom he may victimize.

He is essentially an adventurer, and as he grows into manhood his living is gained by hawking produce or fruit, fish or rabbits, or doing any odd thing that means change of surroundings and no strong adherence to any regular hours of work. So it is that he seldom learns a trade, but has developed a depth of shrewdness and cunning which would surprise many a philosopher of psychology.

By the time war breaks out, he may or may not have seen the inside of a gaol or watch-house, and it is with a thirst for adventure rather than a strong desire to become patriotic that he presents himself at the nearest recruiting office. Discipline in any form is distasteful to him, and it is only when he has been some weeks a soldier that he is conscious of the strong disciplinary measures which his enlistment has placed as a counteractment to his future transgressions.

Generally, the longer his period of military service, the greater his list of military "crimes," and, once he has had a "red-ink" entry in his pay-book, it is not long before the interior of that book assumes quite a florid hue.

As a member of a reinforcement unit, his activities as a breaker of rules and regulations are not fully developed. In this respect the axiom, "Familiarity breeds contempt," suggests the truth of such a philosophy, and especially in regard to his "red-ink" entries. Whether he is of an "original" battalion or a reinforcement company, it is generally the rule that he is comparatively "quiet" at first, but once having tasted the breath of high explosive shells, on any later visit to London he disregards any restraining influence which previously possessed him, and emphasizes by his actions that he has decided upon "a short life and a gay one." His rule, then, is "Cut loose, drink and be unrestrained, for to-morrow we may die."

Dealing with him on disembarkation leave in London, where he is comparatively quiet, we find that he seldom books a bed or cubicle during the day-time, because he is not at all sure where he is likely to "bring up" when the hour of midnight looms near. Often it occurs that he, with a few mates, will fall in with some kindred spirits who are back from France on furlough, in which case they will knock round together, or the "fresh men" will get a few tips from their more learned companions as to the most exciting and pleasing manner of spending three or four days' leave and will go

forth themselves along the lines laid down by the "old 'uns."

This pleasing manner of spending leave will often necessitate their getting "well oiled" in some public house, or they may wander from one "pub" to another during the hours when these places are open for custom. And it is generally the rule that all such places which the rougher element of Australian soldiers patronize are more or less rough themselves, or situated in rather undesirable quarters of the city.

During closed hours, this type of Aussey will frequent such places as Petticoat Lane or some equally notorious thoroughfare, where he will pick up one of the "young-looking" females who are lying in wait for just such men as he. Or he may even wander along the Strand, filling in the hours between drinks by feeding at Lockhart's or other similar institution, or by yarning to cronies he chances to meet on his tour of investigation.

As darkness creeps over the city, and the shaded street-lamps pierce the gloom with downward rays which illuminate but dully their own immediate area of kerb and roadway, so then does the "rougher" Australian begin to really enjoy himself. His body, reinforced by further instalments of liquid refreshment, begins to experience a desire for more exciting adventures than are offered at the public house, and he goes forth in quest of that greatest of all evils to the Australian soldier, the girl on the streets.

It frequently happens that he meets these undesirable females at the pot-house, where he will spend money freely until his vampire realizes that

it is time to get him away from his associates if she is to reap any sort of a financial harvest.

At any period during the next two days, will he show up at Horseferry Road, where he puts up a rather pitiful tale to the pay-sergeant, with a view to receiving further monetary assistance.

"Just a quid ter carry me on, sarge. I'm broke to the wide, dinkum!"

And the sergeant, smelling the fumes of alcohol and noting the unwashed and generally dishevelled condition of the suppliant, will harden his heart and his conscience after corroboration of his beliefs by a glance at the man's "red-ink" pay-book entries, and that worthy will hunch his shoulders and drag himself out, muttering blasphemies against all "—s who are spongin' on their Governmints an' drawin' ten an' a zack a day while they dodge a trip to the firin' line, the cold-footed —s."

By the time he reaches Victoria Street or the Strand, the man has decided upon the only available course open to him if he is to eat and sleep during the day or two left before his leave expires. This is the personal application to mates or more prosperous-looking Ausseys he will encounter about the Strand or outside the "Aldwych" or other such soldiers' institution. This application, often prefaced by a plausible tale or a pathetic explanation, will be couched in the phrase: "Could yer lend us 'alf a dollar—or even a deena, cobber? I ain't 'ad a feed since yisterdee, dinkum, Joe!"

A joke illustrating this sponging process, and which is comparatively old, though it is not in any degree typical of Australians, can be quoted. A

seedy-looking specimen of an Australian soldier was seen to stop a more affluent comrade who was standing outside the "Aldwych" in the Strand. Said the seedy one : " Hey, cobber, will yer gimme a deenah fer a feed—could yer, cobber? I'm broke to the wide." To which the other replied : " Look, digger ; you try the other side uv the street ; I'm workin' this side."

Sometimes these " degenerate " Ausseys receive substantial assistance from their mates of the reinforcement, which enables them to " carry on " until their holiday is over, or they may unearth the Anzac Buffet, where they can secure meals " buck-shee," i.e. without having to pay for them. Others, again, may be unfortunate enough to incur the wrath of watchful M.P.'s, in which case they will spend the remainder of their leave—and possibly further days—in the Warwick Square abode, so familiar to certain members of the Australian Imperial Force.

CHAPTER XXIV

"THOSE ROUGH AUSTRALIANS"

THE notoriety which has been associated with Australian soldiers in general throughout the British Isles has been a decided menace to many thousands of the Commonwealth's best sons during their sojourn in England, and like a millstone round their necks has this bad reputation clung to them to such an extent that many an honest lad wearing the badge of the "Rising Sun" has been a victim of the grossest suspicions on the part of residents in all parts of England where Australian troops have been quartered.

In summing up this question, it is only fair to say that "rumours of evil will spread where good deeds would be curiously hidden." It is only a very small proportion of Australians who are really bad, and it is not diverging from the truth to point out that quite a percentage of them are men who, though enlisted in Australia, have emigrated there from some other country. The mere fact of wearing such a distinctive uniform as that adopted by Australian troops would be sufficient to warrant a far greater interest in and circulation of misdeeds

than would be the case were the men recruited into Imperial regiments and therefore clad in the service uniform of the British Tommy.

To a certain extent there is more natural "wildness" amongst Australian soldiers than amongst their comrades who are serving the King, and they spend money with more freedom than do their English cousins. This in itself is sufficient to cause them to be maligned by those residents of England who are so unintellectual and so narrow and prejudiced that they will not try to understand the men from the Antipodes. The young female element in England is largely responsible for the circulation of Australian soldiers' alleged brutishness, simply because neither side really understands the other. The average Billjim has been a universal respecter of women, and it is a regrettable truth that, possibly owing to the wave of "hero-worship" which has engulfed a large percentage of the English girls of to-day, his morals have consequently weakened in accordance with the trend of English morals, and just sufficiently to give local colour to the stories of him which are in circulation. But whoever would think of blaming the girl?

And so it is that a recently-arrived Australian, up to London on his disembarkation leave, either learns for himself or from other men's experiences that he can, like Kipling's soldier, "take his fun where he finds it," and it is not obscured to any noticeable extent, no matter in what part of England he may later be domiciled. This of course refers to the more youthful and full-blooded type of Australian soldiers, and not to the many thousands of those

who have no susceptibilities in that direction and who have too great a respect for themselves and their own womenfolk to permit them to indulge in anything that would reduce their own high moral code.

It is characteristic of the average Billjim that, when staying with any private family in the British Isles, he is always cordially invited to return for a further visit upon any subsequent "leave" period. Many thousands of English families can testify to the truth of this and to the fact that the introduction of an Australian soldier into the home has been of material benefit to the inmates, who have by such a means learnt what true democracy is, and the advantages of possessing initiative and a vigorous personality.

At Horseferry Road and the various depots of the Y.M.C.A. International Hospitality League quite a number of Australians on leave and without friends are able to take advantage of offers made by English, Scotch, Irish, and Welsh families whereby the Billjim can become their guest. Typed records of the particulars concerning each offer made by residents of the British Isles can be scrutinized upon personal application of the soldier, and many delightful periods have been spent by him through the kindness of the people concerned.

Sometimes it happens that men who could be labelled as "steady" get into some scrape while on leave. This may take the form of a seemingly harmless military "crime" they have committed, which, when detected, sends the perpetrator to Warwick Square, pending "orderly-room." As an instance, a man may be two or three hours late in reporting

from leave, due to some unforeseen circumstance, and he is put into the "clink" for the night, if his case cannot be dealt with the same day. Should he be a very sensitive individual, this herding of him in with men who are in detention for all manner of outrageous deeds is a most depressing experience, and often tends to harden him towards the authorities. Or he may be the victim of some amorous adventure which eventually lands him behind barbed wire, where he will languish in shame and humiliation until he eventually becomes so hardened through daily intercourse with other more callous inmates of the "barbed-wire sanatorium" that he is no longer sensitive to shame and the association of men of very much baser instincts. This of course would only apply to men who had no real force of character, and even among the Australians there are many who could come under this category.

It was during the four days of disembarkation leave in London that our men became convinced that their comrades of the artillery were of a much superior type all round than those who comprise an average infantry unit. In Australia they had been slightly conscious of the fact, but now there was no disputing it. Everywhere one met the gunners, they were well-behaved, and it would be most unusual to find any of them creating any sort of disturbance or looking like half-inebriated tramps in a soiled uniform about the precincts of the Strand or the East End. The explanation of this comparison is indeed simple. The man who has intelligence and a natural instinct for machinery or horses will try and get into the artillery, as also

will the man who desires to fight in a distinctive branch.

Further, it has been the rule in Australia that unless specially qualified and desirous of being an artilleryman, you must go into the infantry. Vacancies occurring in the artillery are filled up from the infantry only when suitable new recruits are not forthcoming, and naturally the officer who is selecting his men will invariably choose those who by their looks and bearing are the most likely to keep his battery "clean." The same rule applies to the Light Horse, and to some extent to every other "special" unit of the A.I.F. Thus the "hard-case" is and always will be an infantryman, but the explanation will show why our men were not wrong in their final opinion when forced by circumstances to make the comparison. To counter-balance this "social" question somewhat, the Australian infantryman is the only being who, among the rank and file, can claim to having seen and participated in war in its most forbidding aspect. He it is who can speak with more experience than anyone else upon all the phases of a great battle—the carnage wrought by all manner of war implements, and the grim "hanging-on" or the slightly nervous and then exhilarated feeling during an attack over the top. Also he has recognized himself to be the universal drudge of every other arm of the service. A Billjim, if questioned upon this matter, would quickly give his version. "Gord speed the crows!" he would ejaculate. "We do everythin'. If they want drains dug, or roads mended, or trenches ter be dug, or filled in, or lorgs

ter be sawed, or anythin' at all done, us infantry coves gets it. They're always after a fatigue-party from us, even if there's plenty of other units idlin' round. We get told off fer Engineer's fatigue, A.S.C. fatigue, A.M.C. fatigue—everythin'. And they even got the nerve ter make us clean up the transport lines sometimes. Ain't it the limit, bein' in the 'gravel-crushers'? But p'r'aps we are best off, 'coz we don't 'ave no everlarstin' 'orses ter look after. W'en we've finished a job, we've finished. Not like the blokes who work 'orses; they ain't never finished. An' look; every time they want some blokes fer fatigue, it's my platoon 'as ter do it. Every time, dinkum."

Thus the main "grouch" of the foot-soldier.

In spite of the procedure which gives the infantry more than a fair share of Australia's rough soldiers, there are many thousands of men serving in that branch of our Army who are intellectually the equal of their comrades in the horse units, and some of the best educated of the Australians are privates in the "foot-sloggers." So we are really a "mixed" lot.

CHAPTER XXV

EXPERIENCES. THE TOMMY INSTRUCTOR

THE muster parade which was held at the training battalion on the Plain on the day following our return from disembarkation leave was highly successful from an orderly-room point of view. Practically everybody who had journeyed to London was back "home" to time, with the exception of a few of the boys who had developed influenza or other such malady, and which necessitated their admission into one of the London military hospitals, and also a handful of the "wilder" type who had apparently yielded to the transitory delights of a few more days of freedom.

With a sense of the fitness of things, in so much that men just off leave are more or less "stale" and require a day in which to recuperate, the officers were very lenient in the matter of parades during the working hours of this our first day after our return to camp. And, besides, there were several of the unit who would not report back from leave until the following evening, as they had gone to Scotland and Ireland, and therefore had the privilege

of two extra days. So we just carried on independently.

Among the unit, curiosity was rife as to the various ways in which different parties spent their days and nights, and an account of any laughable incident or humorous situation was received with hilarious appreciation by a large circle of the boys. The picturesque language used in the descriptive passages of some of the narratives at times brought forth roars of laughter, and one could very easily see that the average Australian is possessed of a keen sense of humour, and that he looks upon his fellows, those whose yarn-spinning proclivities are well developed, as "fair dags uv blokes."

"He's a 'character,' that bloke," they would exclaim admiringly, after listening to a "cobber" recounting his experiences.

Another trait which showed itself during several of these recitals was the unswerving loyalty of the boys to each other.

"And, yer see, I couldn't leave me cobber, so I 'ad ter let 'er go"; or "Course my mate 'e was 'broke' and so I gave him a couple uv quid, an' a' course that left me short, an' I couldn't come ter light on 'er proposition." These are typical of the "apologies" which were given for not investigating many tempting opportunities for amorous adventures.

The unsophisticated side of their natures was shown, when going into details of their first day's adventures.

"I 'ad ter go to Aldwych," one, a saw-mill hand from the Northern Rivers, explained. "Got inter

the train at Charing Cross an' bought me ticket, and after gettin' lorst down them draughty tunnels, I found the place where yer get on to the train. 'Underground' they calls it; Gordstruth, it was underground, an' here am I ridin' on an' on, sittin' like a stuffed owl an' kiddin' meself I knows all about where I'm goin', 'coz I ain't goin' ter look the big mug by arstin' people where or how far Aldwych Station is, and, sparemedays, after I'd been ridin' fer an hour an' sees a lot uv the same names on the stations again, I says to a Tommy bloke next to me, I says, 'Hey, chum, 'ow many miles 'ave I gotter go on this b—— train before I gets ter Aldwych?' He didn't seem ter get me at first, so I arsts 'im again, and then 'e says, lookin' blank-like out uv the winders, 'Oh,' he says, 'you be in the wrong train, chum. You stop in this until you get ta Charin' Crawse, an' then you change. You be on the Inner Circle now.' 'But,' I says, 'I been sittin' 'ere waitin' ter see the name "Aldwych" on one uv the stations, an' all I seen was a lot uv the names wot I passed at first.' 'Ya-as,' he says, 'you could keep on ridin' all day, chum, an' you'd not see Aldwych Station. You be goin' round and round. Didn't nobody tell yer about where ye had to change?' 'No,' I says. 'P'r'aps they thought I wuz on 'eadquarters an' nu the joint.' 'You should ask,' he says. 'They be confusin', these 'ere tubes, an' you Ausseys bein' strange to it—even my missus she do get on the wrong train sometimes, an' she was born in the city. Charin' Crawse be the next station, chum. Get out there, an' ask; that be your best plan.'

"And, fair dinkum, that cove with 'is bulgy eyes an' slowness at jerryin' ter wot I wants fair reminded me uv a calf we 'ad once, oney 'e looked better fed, an' 'ad pink cheeks."

"I've been directed from one platform to another and often found myself back at the same place again," a one-time agricultural student exclaimed. "But," he continued, "the greatest joke that I can tell against myself happened the first day. I was with three other chaps—all Ausseys—and we wanted to get from Madame Twoswords in Baker Street to the Anzac Buffet in Victoria Street. Had no idea how to get there, so I pulled up a taxi-bloke and told him where we wanted to go, and then all of us got in. It didn't take him long to get there, and I was looking at the taxi-thing and watching the figures changing, you know, the fare. When we stopped I thought I'd be a shrewd-head, and had a good look at the figures. It said one and nine. Well, there were four of us, and any fool knows that four one and nines is seven bob. Anyhow, to make sure, an' to save my cobbers from payin' their own 'wack,' I asked the driver bloke if one and nine was for each man, and he said 'Sure!' so I gave him seven bob. It was only later on, when I found I'd been a big gazoo country yahoo that the significance of the taxi-chap's parting words came to me: 'You Ausseys—I like drivin' yer! Good-bye-ee.'"

"The coves wot amused me," said a young fellow of cockney extraction who had sailorized in three hemispheres, "were some orficers—Horstralian's they wus. Nothin' countrified abart them. I first seen them—one wus a three-star artist an' the other

wus a bleedin' major—wiff some flash tabbies just a-comin' out uv a flash joint—a big res'trant in Piccadilly, an' so I 'dooked 'em one' as I passed, seein' as they're Ausseys. An' one of 'em 'ad the Military Crawse an' the other wus wearin' four other ribbons. I could 'ear them talkin' in a hawful swanky way—an' they wus fine, big, smart-lookin' blokes, an' although their uneforms an' Sam Browns wus not new they looked bonzer; fair dinkum gord blokes. Nex' mornin' I goes out to see me brother wot's cookin' at Warwick Square, an' just as I'm goin' inter tha buildin', speedthacrows, there wuz these two orficers standin' among some big police jacks, an' they wus 'andcuffed ter each other.

"I chips a bloke I knew and arsts 'im all abart it, an' 'e tells me they is a couple uv privates wot been adrift—a.w.l.—fer nearly six muns, an' they'd been livin' like toffs at different big 'otels ararnd Lunnnon, an' mixin' wiff all the 'eads—'ad money of their own—an' they'd be goin' yet but fer bein' split on by a couple uv tabbies they'd narked through bein' seen wiff other tabbies. This bloke I know told me that the major one oney larst week wus walkin' through Waterloo stytion an' 'e passed a squad uv blokes under a one-star hartist—they wus waitin' fur a trine fur Perham Dahns—an' the leftenant 'e calls the squad to attention an' salutes the major bloke, who returns it languid-like as 'e strolls past. An' the 'major' twigs in a second that the one-star orficer was a gent 'e'd been batman to, just before 'e imshied¹ off from the battalion six muns before. Dags! ain't they?

¹ Went.

"An' jus' before I'm leavin' the clink, alorn'g comes a solemn-lookin' padre belongin' ter the A.I.F. 'E returns the s'lute uv tha sentry, an' we all springs ter 'tention, an' I'm wonderin' if we've fell in fur prayers an' that, an' arter 'e'd returned the s'lute uv tha provost-sergeant wot dooked 'im one, 'e says, smilin' kind-like, 'e says, 'Isn't this a b——, boys? I'm giving myself up because I've no G'd damn money left. Did you really think I was a dinkum parson?' "

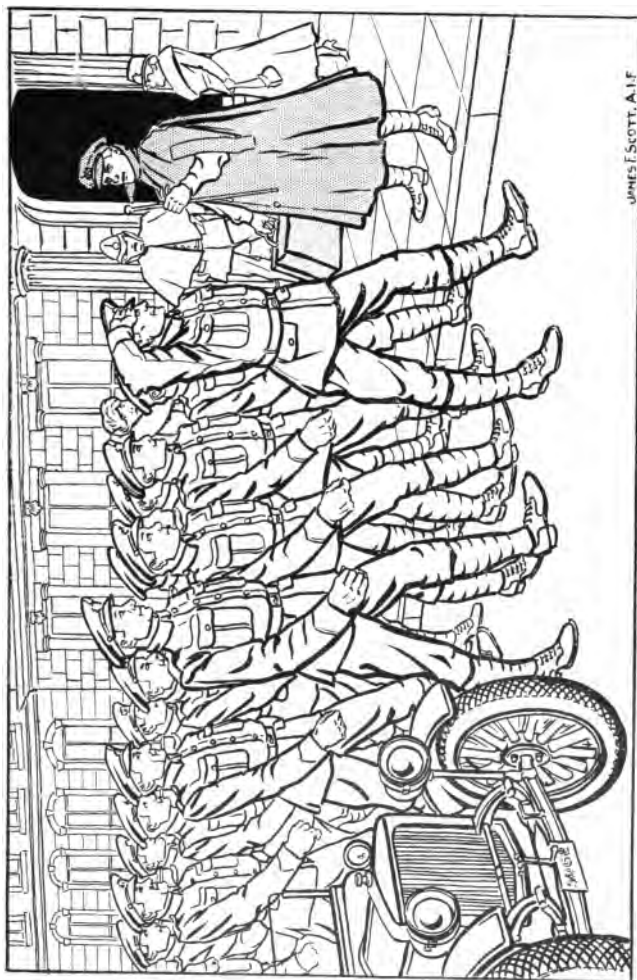
Another of the group—a corporal—narrated an experience he had had, relating to wrongful saluting.

"I was wearing one of those 'tailor-made' caps, officers' pattern, and an 'issue' mackintosh cape, a couple of days ago, when I was walking along a street in South Kensington. Course I had a stick—happened to be taking a suit-case to a friend's place, when along comes a full platoon of Tommies under a sergeant-major. Do you know, I felt an awful fool when I heard the sergeant-major order the Tommies to march to attention, and then he gave the order 'Eyes—left,' and saluted with great dash. But I returned the salute—you know the way officers do, by half-lifting their sticks; and I couldn't help it, really, because I didn't want to make a fool of that smart N.C.O. in front of his men."

And so the varied experiences of many types of Australians among our reinforcement were related until we could almost imagine ourselves back in the great city from which so many of our boys had reluctantly journeyed back to military duty.

On the third day following our return to hut life,

Down of California



"I DIDN'T WANT TO MAKE A FOOL OF THAT SMART N.C.O."

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those of our unit who had been to Scotland or Ireland were back with us again. They were unanimous in their praise of the countries they had visited and the kindness and generosity of the people they had met.

This disembarkation leave for reinforcements before proceeding overseas was responsible for many experiences encountered by our fellows which taught them the value of comparisons and which infused into them that growing broadness of mind which only travel and observation can produce. Their mental faculties were accelerated by reason of their contact with new conditions, and a great majority were prepared to carry on with their military training, now that they were actually back among the "dixies and bed-boards"—happy in their knowledge of having had a good time and also in having acquired an insight into matters of moment or interest which their leave had rendered possible. So it was with light hearts that the unit marched off for an hour's bayonet-fighting exercises after battalion parade had been disposed of, on this, our first day's resumption of solid soldiering.

Evidently the reinforcement was looked upon as a trained lot now, because it had for its instruction the Staff-Sergeant-Major Instructor in P.T. and B.F. of the Group. This important being, an ex-Regular, and a type of the real old school of smart men, was a pure-bred cockney with a fine appreciation for the use of "cutting" speech, and on several former occasions we had listened to him detailing some exercise to a squad of lusty Ausseys, and had marvelled at the speed with which he could reel off

any detail. It was his habit to keep up a running fire of caustic satire during each "stand easy" period, and any "recruit" who had been in the faintest degree slow or "unfinished" in his demonstration of an exercise could never hope that his action would escape comment. A sample of his methods was exhibited to our fellows on this particular morning as, with equipment on and scabbards on their rifles, they stood in two long ranks facing each other at a distance of some eight paces.

"Nah then," said the instructor, as he stood at one end of the formation, "I'll just give yer a few bleedin' hexercises ta get the stiffness out o' yer, arter yer little plunge inter 'igh life. Nah, mind yer use yer himagination, an' kid yerselves there's 'Uns ter be slaughtered. Hon Gord!—Nah, nah, too much like the bleedin' Landstrum—st'nd-esy! Some uv you Horstralians still think yer out wiff yer donah 'n liftin' 'er week-end suit-case on the return trip. Yer wants ter wike up, me lads. This ain't no young lidies' cemetary. Hon Gord! Naw that's better—an' just keep yerselves like that. That bloke at the other end there—you wiff the big end—striten that leg—that's hit—keep them pints hup an' steady! Nah then! A long pint at the 'art an' a wiffdraw, follered by a short pint at de froat—wiffdraw—hon guard—'igh port—choinge ovah. Wot's that man movin' for?—we ain't started yit. Point!"

The movement having been completed in a creditable manner, the instructor continued:

"Stand—sy! That's not too dusty, but yer

want 'finish.' I never did like takin' a squad wot's been sowin' hits wild hoats—it don't 'ave its mind hon the job. But you Ausseys pick up quick. That bloke wiff de walrus mo—you. Nex' time you wiffdraw, don't 'andle yer rifle's though it wus stuck hinter a newspiper; pull it out wiff a jerk! Nah we'll 'ave a long pint at the 'art oney, an' see that everybody *moves*. Squad—Hip! Long point at the 'art—Point! Hin-hout-on-guard. S-tan-sy! Several uv yer horter git pinched fer loiterin'."

For the next half-hour the instruction continued, and with it a constantly changing criticism and humorous invective of the work done. The near approach of a staff-captain, who, like all of his kind, was over-burdened with curiosity, had a tendency to increase the instructor's powers of verbal activity.

"Nah then—Hon Gord!—Stand—esy. Lord-luvableinduck! I'd like ter 'ave some of yer hopposite me wiff binets if yer was bleedin' 'Uns." His all-seeing eye detected a man who was not directly opposite his *vis-à-vis* of the "odd" numbers. "That bloke—you, Jimmy—you wiff de lean dial—'ave yer turned into a tree, or are yer standin' on a quid, or—squad—hip!——"

But he was interrupted by the staff officer, who was sitting on his horse some distance away, watching the squad:

"Sergeant-major!"

The instructor spun round, saluted briskly, and turned to the squad again.

"St'nd — esy!" he commanded, and then doubled over to within a yard of the officer, where

he straightened and flashed his hand in another rapid salute. "Sir?"

The "brass-hat" went through the motion of languidly casting his right ear from him.

"Oh—aw—sergeant-major, you might let me see that squad at work on the bags, will you? They look capable fellahs, s'am-major!"

"Yessir. Just back from their 'oneymoos," replied the instructor, as he saluted again and wheeled round. "Nah, youse Anzacs"—he lowered his voice as he approached the squad—"that bleedin' storf bloke—'im wiff the red on 'is pretty clothes—'e wants ta see yer do a bituva 'op-ovah.' 'E sys yer look a bleedin' smort lot, so tickle yerselves hup this time, soas 'im wot's done up like a sore toe'll git art quick an' lively. We'll move ovah t' the stuffed 'Uns, an' give this bloke somethin' ter write 'ome abart. Squad—S'—hoan!"

This speech, every word of which was delivered with an amazing and almost unintelligible speed, conveyed to us the "familiar" attitude of the average Tommy instructor towards all Australians. One has yet to hear any of them "confide" in an English squad to the same extent. But then our bayonet fighting expert was something of a psychologist.

"A dag uv a bloke, but the sort yer can work for," was the general opinion of our unit upon conclusion of the exercises.

CHAPTER XXVI

AUSTRALIAN-ENGLISH MARRIAGES

THE important points in the action of Australian soldiers marrying English girls formed a topic of considerable interest to the members of our battalion sergeants' mess during the next few days. This came about through several of the senior N.C.O.'s and a few of the men who had married English girls giving a dance at an adjacent small town, for which occasion invitations were issued to a number of "reliable" Ausseys and also to some of the "more select" girls residing there. A committee consisting of half a dozen Australian Benedicts and their wives managed the affair, which was completely successful from a social point of view, because everybody enjoyed themselves in spite of the fact that these English girls did not dance the "one-step" or even a "two-step" according to the more modern ideas of such dances in Australia. And the function made an opening for the commencement of a number of friendships between the Colonials and their fair partners.

Some of these girls had lived in different parts of

England on various occasions, and had experienced the usual social life of people who have received a modern education under somewhat limited moneyed conditions. In the majority of instances they had gone into offices and shops after leaving school, and being ordinarily attractive girls had had opportunities for acquiring the town girl's knowledge of men of their own station in England.

The average English girl who possessed a "dinkum" Australian husband belonged to this class of the community, and sometimes she remained at business after her marriage, and even lived with her people until an opportunity should be afforded for more romantic surroundings. It was wartime, they argued, and of course all sensible people would rather be occupied in slightly remunerative employment than sitting indoors twiddling their thumbs while their hubbies conformed to the regulation hours of parades and other military duties. Besides, it wasn't always possible to secure house accommodation in an area adjacent to the husband's depot, even if he remained in England for any definite period.

It was very gratifying to us Colonials to hear the opinions and views of these English wives in respect to the average steady type of Australian soldier. What interested us most of all was to participate in a serious discussion regarding the Aussey as a lover and husband, when compared with the Englishman, and also to learn the views of the married Australians when comparing their English wives with the girls they had known prior to leaving the Commonwealth.

When one has associated with English people to any extent, it is not impossible to set down the "average" opinion that is in existence amongst them concerning any definite subject upon which they will disclose their views.

The substance of many serious debates wherein the English girl compares her Aussey husband or his comrades with the men she had known in peacetime can be quoted, since it may offer some explanation as to why so many English girls are marrying the men from "down under."

According to these girls—many of them are women with matured ideas and the capacity of understanding—the Australian as a lover is a very different proposition to the Englishman. There was a personality about him—a continuous aliveness, and an alertness of faculties that provided a fresh and invigorating stimulus to a girl who had been all her life used to the more reserved and sometimes ponderously slow ways of the Englishman. As a lover, the Australian could be topping. Before she quite realized it, the English girl would be swept off her feet by the manner of his love-making. It was so direct, so very audacious, and yet sincere withal, and therefore it became a delight and a necessity after the somewhat reserved and careful attitude of the Englishman.

Such is a digest of many opinions expressed not only by English girls who are married to Australians, but by others of their countrywomen belonging to various classes of society.

At the dance which some of us attended, and which was responsible for the introduction of

English-Australian alliances as a serious subject for discussion in the sergeants' mess, we were able to gather further views, and it will simplify matters by presenting the practically verbatim report of a conversation in connection with the subject, which took place between one of the hostesses, Mrs. Brown, and a serious-minded Billjim, during the supper interval. They had known each other for many weeks, these two, and each had an appreciative respect for the other's opinions, and welcomed any opportunity which would allow them to discuss questions of mutual interest. The Australian opened the subject by asking his partner if she would satisfy his curiosity as to the reasons which prompted English girls to marry Australians.

"Mind," he said, "I know you have been married for some months, and so I don't want you to use your own experiences on the subject—rather just a general explanation, if you felt disposed to give one."

His companion smiled, evidently pleased to be so consulted.

"Why shouldn't I?" she replied. "I'll be delighted, and especially when my own ideas and experiences are much the same as those of quite a lot of my girl friends in different parts of England who are now married to Australians. You see, when a girl who is fond of an unusual kind of man finds that her pals are also attracted by the same species, well, naturally they compare notes, and love to discuss with each other the quite unique brand of masculine which has loomed up, and by its very diversity of type has created an entirely

new basis for thought in regard to one's ideals of man. You may think I'm biased because my hubby is an Australian. Well, perhaps I am, but even then you will at least get my point of view as an English girl, and that is what you want, isn't it?"

"Yes, if you will be so kind."

"Right-o! Perhaps I'd best make you understand by comparing the Australian with the Englishman, and using the 'general' and 'socially equal'—as far as generalities are concerned—types of each from which to make the comparison. The first thing I noticed about the Australians was their direct, searching gaze. There was nothing offensive about it—it merely gave you the impression that they were politely interested in you as a type and wanted to decide at once if you were attractive or otherwise. Later, after I had met this type in a conventional way, their quick grasp of things and ability to understand any situation interested me indeed, and I felt that I had known them for months instead of days. Then I thought what splendid pals they could be, and how much broader of mind were they than the Englishmen I had known, that is, generally speaking."

The Billjim chuckled.

"Yes, go on. As lovers——"

The Englishwoman interrupted him with a little gesture of warning.

"I shall have to be most careful, won't I? As a lover, I should say that the Australian is very up-to-date. He most certainly isn't slow or painfully inept, on the contrary, he is inclined to be

aggressive without being disrespectful, if you can get my meaning. He lets you know what he wants and does not stand on ceremony about it, but he doesn't really offend or persist, unless of course you give him sufficient opportunity. He is also different to the Englishman in so much that he is more open, more easily understood, and more natural. The Home man is too uncommunicative and too stiff and formal. Either his mind is too inaccessible or he hasn't any depth or intelligence. With him you don't get the brisk happy medium, and the more natural and 'cave-man' ideas which predominate in the Australian. The latter makes up his mind quickly, because he has the capacity to reason with greater speed and a deeper understanding of what he demands from a girl whom he could love. He would ask a girl to marry him within a couple of months of first meeting her, provided they loved each other. The Englishman would be more careful; he would generally insist upon a long, dragging engagement and would be influenced by countless little things that had long since been buried or forgotten. By this I mean that he would not be so ready to marry a girl for what she was, but for what she had been. The Australian would be more inclined to love her for herself alone, and I think that sort of love is of far greater value. There is such a difference in their respective breadth of mind in this way."

"You really do think that our fellows are not so keen on having everything correct as far as the conventionalities demand?" inquired the Australian.

His companion regarded him with serious eyes.

"I mean this." She paused, and then continued : "Suppose, for argument's sake, that an average English couple were engaged, and the girl confessed to some indiscretion years before. The lover would, in most cases, be horrified, and a breach would rise. Now I know of two different girls who decided to test the depth and value of their respective Australian's love by inventing and relating fictitious confessions to them. It made not the slightest difference to those men—in fact, they created each for his fiancée an even greater atmosphere of security and protection—and their love for the 'weak things' developed an even greater intensity. The Englishman, also, is rather too fond of being tyrannical."

"Perhaps that comes about through the long-established custom of the weaker being dominated by the stronger?"

"Yes, certainly. But it doesn't show any sign of a system of give and take, and consideration for the weaker or smaller one's opinions. And my husband is adamant in stating that the members of most Australian families are more independent towards each other, and there is not nearly the same degree of rigid and tyrannical rule."

"Well, of course," said Billjim, "we reason that every mind as it develops is entitled to be used, and therefore to form opinions. But we're getting off the main topic, aren't we? To return——"

He let his voice trail off and regarded the girl at his side with amused expectancy. She frowned in mock vexation, but in a moment turned to him with laughter in her eyes.

"I can tell you quite frankly that it is a unique and not altogether unpleasant experience for an English girl to have as a lover a strong, vigorous fellow who has seen something of the world—who has voluntarily elected to fight in a terrible war, and who is redolent with the suggestion and power of adaptability for any kind of emergency. Such men are awake. Their personalities are at the same time both fascinating and compelling, and one could not help feeling a wonderful reliance about them—that their quick way of gripping a situation would always prevent them from becoming engulfed in the back-wash of failure and obscurity."

"That's very nice to know, Mrs. Brown. Perhaps you have been unlucky—I mean that you may have been unfortunate in meeting only the narrow-minded type of Englishman. Surely our fellows are not so obviously broader in mind as you would imply, taking each party as a whole?"

"I have found them rather different to our men in that way, and my acquaintance amongst so-called 'nice' Englishmen is fairly extensive. The latter seem to be unable to get away from hide-bound prejudices, and one has to alter one's ideas and readjust them every now and then, in order to keep in with the advance of the world in thought and action. For instance, isn't it better to have as a husband a man who is capable of reasoning and weighing with due fairness, and with sufficient allowance for the weaknesses of human nature? Isn't he an easier man to live with than one who sticks rigidly to red tape or conventionality, since these

traditional foundation-stones do not allow for any change of the human being, and make no allowances for a proper understanding and sympathy for the weaker side of an individual ? ”

The Australian's frank interest was aroused.

“ But surely,” he reasoned, “ you'll get some of that broadness among your own men, and, anyway, you seem positive in your belief in our fellows—that they *are* so broad-minded. And wouldn't it strike you that what our fellows might condone in their wives or their friends, so would they the more readily condone in themselves ? ”

The Englishwoman replied without any hesitation :

“ I have had many very serious and delightful debates with some of your deeper-thinking and intelligent men, and it is they who have given me this broadness of view which I am advocating. I mean that their views have helped me to observe the trend of the people of to-day and to correspondingly allow for the changes which are taking place. We English people do not incline toward democracy of thought : we are not used to taking a situation by the shoulders and observing the whys and wherefores of it. Rather are we still to be found clinging to beliefs that are hopelessly out-of-date and therefore of no assistance to us as a means whereby we can make the world an easier place in which to live. As for a man being more inclined to condone things in himself because he has a broad mind—that, don't you think, is entirely a question of inclination ? Don't you think that all men are more or less their own masters and will do anything

that appeals to them sufficiently whether they would condone it in others or not ? ”

“ But if they were steeped in an atmosphere of conventionalism and were prone to radiate their high moral code—— ? ”

His companion interrupted him.

“ Yes, I know what you are going to say. My dear man, surely you know that man as a being has always imagined himself to be by natural right a free lance as far as *his* own moral actions are concerned and that the very fellows who are constantly harping on the wickedness of immorality are either hypocrites or have no capacities for the study of psychology. No ! Give me the man who can reason and sympathize with the weak—one who can see both points of view. He will not be so quarrelsome and stubborn, because he is not moulded from a cast which can think only in one direction. He is more charitable.”

“ And you think that the Australian is more inclined to take things at their face value ? ”

“ Yes, I do. And further, he is not so fond of bargaining. In a case of true love there are no conditions. What hosts of marriages occur in England in which there is no real love. It is like an employer insisting on an employé having tons of references. There is no deep affection there, surely.”

“ That’s mainly true. But supposing an employé without references became a valued addition to the staff and later a damaging report of former misdeeds reached his employer’s ears—the employé might find himself adrift ? ”

"Only in the case of his being unfortunate enough to have a narrow-minded master, and that's the simile I wanted, because it illustrates what I mean by the average Englishman. But once again we're drifting away from the main channels. Certainly I think you will find good and bad, broad and narrow, in every community, and perhaps I've been too emphatic on certain points, and probably further serious consideration would suggest that the Australian is inclined to be impulsive and not a little selfish in some ways. But tell me what you have gathered in respect to the Australian's opinion of the English girl. We'll sit this next dance out, if you like."

The man from "down under" crossed one neatly-puttied leg over the other before he replied :

"I'd love to carry on with the corroboree,"¹ he said. "But of course I can only give you a general idea, partly personal and partly gathered from some of the married fellows here." He waved a hand to include the assembly on the polished floor. "Of course," he resumed, "this, too, would be a comparison, and to the best of my belief a very general one at that, between the Australian girl and her English cousin. Apparently from our point of view, or at least from the point of view of the Aussey who marries here, the English girl strikes him as being a good pal. He sees quite a lot of her, perhaps, because he goes to dances, or has a bike and gets right out to various villages and small towns on week-end leave, or on night leave. As his acquaintance ripens, he finds that her natural inclination is

¹ Talk.

for a domestic life. There is little desire on her part to trot about and be admired and flattered by every attractive man she meets, and she doesn't want to go to the cinema or dances every second night in the week ; instead, prefers the comfort of her own home and fireside. She is not quite so fond of sport as the Aussey girl, and apparently values a good pal more for what he is to her than for what she can get out of him."

Mrs. Brown held up a warning finger.

"That's a severe indictment against the Australian girl, isn't it ? Is she really the other way, or is it that you're too lenient with our girls ?"

The Australian regarded the whirling couples in front of him.

"No," he said at length. "I'm trying to be impartial, from all aspects. Lots of Australian girls over-dress themselves. They don't strike the happy medium of these people. In the country, in Aussie, many of the girls don't dress nicely—with taste, and in the cities they are inclined to overdo it. The English girl dresses neatly but plainly in garments often made by herself, but at the same time well cut according to the mode. You couldn't say that she was not stylish, nor that she overdid things. Her natural complexion by contrast to the Australian girl's is as a damask-rose petal to a half-ripe grain of wheat, and she seldom requires to use lip salve. She is sympathetic without being cheeky ; is not too independent—in fact she leans on you and in that way appeals to a man's best instincts, whereas our girls are most independent beings. Then the English girl also has a due regard

for the value of money, and is in many respects more maternal than her Australian cousin."

"What makes you have that idea?" Mrs. Brown inquired. "When you tell me, we'll have this extra—it's a waltz."

The Australian laughed shortly.

"I s'pose it's the sympathy which most English girls exhibit," he said. "Our girls aren't so very full of sympathy, and probably we are more inclined to look for it now than we were in Australia—and we get it, you see."

His eyes expressed an enjoyment of the effect this latter avowal had upon the face of his partner as they arose simultaneously and moved off to the tune of a Strauss waltz.

But he had given a very shrewd guess as to the motive which is largely responsible for so many Australian-English marriages. To the general run of steady Australians in England who marry, it would suggest that absence makes the heart grow fonder for the first week or two, and perhaps longer. Later, it would seem that by natural processes the departed soldier should grow slightly more indifferent, because there is no longer the personal magnetism and influence of the "loved" one to hold him. He is existing on a memory and not on a flesh-and-blood individual whose former proximity stirred his pulses or made his eyes shine with appreciation and adoration. Unless an unusual attachment, the real will always be stronger than the abstract—the practical more powerful than the theoretical.

Is it quite fair to expect an impulsive and somewhat casual being—especially if that being is a man

who by likely circumstances may never return from his trip into a world-war—to exist on a memory which must grow more dim as time, distance, and new attractions exert their influence? Even the most steadfast of men, unless caught in the embrace of a “perfect unity,” will find themselves inclined to drift from their former anchorage unless they exert such things as honour and principle to stem the current of their desires.

The Australian is more a creature of impulses, and inclined to listen to his heart rather than to his conscience. Therein lies his fault, if fault it should be.

To the looker-on—who, they say, sees most of the game—it would seem that the advantages are all with the visiting Billjim. Although he may be engaged to or have an understanding with a girl in his own country, and sails away with an honest intention and desire to remain true to the compact, as he sees more of life and fresh types, so does he begin, almost sub-consciously, to readjust his ideas of the opposite sex. Should he sojourn in England at some period following a spell of fighting, his path is strewn with temptations from the first day of his introduction to a fair English girl or into the home of any pleasant British family, and the temptations to forget his compact are doubled if he is a wounded man and is lucky enough to have English girl friends to visit him at the war hospital or convalescent home.

Usually it is the case that only at rare intervals does he receive correspondence, etc., from his girl in Australia, and there is a vacancy in his receptive

mind—or heart—for a lot of girlish sympathy, the desire for which the long periods of sex loneliness on a troop-ship, in France, or in England has rendered the more acute. Inwardly suffering from this loneliness and longing for a sympathy which distance and an irregular mail service prevents the Australian girl from radiating, he meets the English girl. This girl is also sex-lonely and is quite unattracted by any man in her own little world. This new type of man—the direct Australian—very soon captivates her, and before he realizes it she has made of him an idol and an ideal. Then he discovers that she has a sympathy of understanding which he has never before experienced. But he seldom considers the matter sufficiently to discover that he is now like a dry sponge that is being gradually immersed in water—that now, of all periods, is he the more susceptible to the charm of female companionship. But he makes another pleasing discovery. He finds a less frivolous being than the one he left behind, one who is somehow not independent of him—a subtle cord to bind—and his strength goes out to her in her feminine weakness.

It is usually only a short period following this that Mr. Billjim finds himself in love with this girl who radiates sympathy. Then is he thrilled to discover that she makes an unconditional surrender, that she demands only to be allowed to love him, that she asks nothing in return. Amazed, and not unflattered by the depth and intensity of the love that is given to him, the Australian marries this girl of frank mien and rosy countenance. By this action he effectively puts a stop to the former con-

stant ache for a girl's sympathy and the home-sick feeling which had previously made itself felt through long separation from those of his kith and kin left behind in Australia.

He now has a home in England, and if he goes to France again, well, that place is just across the Channel, and the probability of another "Blighty" or "leave" period suggests a renewal of matrimonial bliss. Besides, when he left Australia during the early days of the war, it did not occur to him that he'd be away for three or four years at the least.

And although he may be acting according to the dictates of his impulsive mind—since he is in most senses a practical individual—there is still the underlying suggestion that he is selfish, if his action be judged from his former sweetheart's point of view. But then the Australian girl could hardly realize just what her "boy" has gone through, and it is a question whether she would not act in the same way were the respective positions of the two reversed.

CHAPTER XXVII

MORE EXPERIENCES. THE DINKUM AUSSEY. ON DRAFT

WE were "on draft." This news was conveyed to us just a week after our return from disembarkation leave. About one hundred and twelve of the reinforcement were selected, and it was stated that our departure would be within the next four days at least.

So now came the great preparations for serious business, the issuing to each man of all the equipment that the authorities consider he should carry overseas. Also, by those who had neglected the action previously, wills were made.

It was just about this time that the few of our unit who had stopped over their leave period began to arrive back at the training battalion. In most instances they were returned to us under escort, having been apprehended by the Anzac Provost Corps and lodged in Warwick Square until they should be brought down to our own T.B. guard-room. Some of the delinquents had become extremely precocious and cheeky since going on leave,

and it was astonishing how quickly they had been influenced by other more degenerate Australians on leave from France, and with whom they had in most instances consorted. One young fellow, on being tried by the C.O. and sentenced to twenty-eight days No. 2 and six days R.W., looked calmly at the colonel and in a voice under perfect control said : " Yer makin' it a welter, ain't yer, digger ? "

These fellows had become acquainted with all kinds of make-shifts in order to carry on after reaching the " broke " stage. They informed us how they had gone to the War Chest building in Horseferry Road and had secured a pound's worth of tickets, the amount for which was duly entered in their pay-books, according to the custom of the officials in that depot. Instead of using these tickets as a means to secure beds and meals at the War Chest, they had sold the tickets to " old hands " outside at a 15 per cent reduction. But they had 15s. in hard cash to carry on with, and to buy more beer.

The terms " Coal Hole " and " Dirty Dick's " were extremely familiar to them, and in their accounts of sundry adventures it was a frequent allusion for them to say, " Yes, I found 'im—arst a couple uv blokes I knew if they'd seen 'im an' they said 'e was at ' Dirty Dick's ' arf an ' our ago." Very few of the rougher type of Australian soldiers visiting London are unfamiliar with the Coal Hole or Dirty Dick's as a favourite rendezvous wherein to absorb copious draughts of beer and talk to the painted and high-heeled customers always to be found there.

One of these "dags uv blokes" related, among other things, an adventure he had had which portrayed the rather obscure, simple side of such men's natures.

"I 'ad been told ter see Madame Twosword's wax-works," he said, "an' arter gettin' lorst"—here he diverged somewhat—"yer know, it took me three days ter git me bearin's in London, 'coz at furst every move I made 'ad me bushed, an' if I arst a John, an' went as 'e directed, I'd find meself back at the same ole spot I started from—an', Gordblarmey, I uster be afraid 'ter cross the Strand at furst, for fear I'd git run over—well, anyway, I got to this 'ere Madame Twosword's, an' seein' a big policeman standin' outside on tha footpath, I arsts 'im which door yer go into ter see the joint. 'E just looks out over tha street an' I'm waitin' fur 'im ter tell me, an' so I lights a fag, an' says somethin' ter 'im about gettin' lorst that mornin' an' 'ow easy it is ter get bushed an' that, an' just then another Aussey screws me off an' comes larfin' acraws tha street an' gits ter where I'm standin' talkin' ter the John just as I arsts the big police-bloke if the joint inside is worth seein', an' at that the Aussey sits down on tha curb, larfin' like a jackass, an' dinkum, 'e couldn't speak fur larfin', an' then 'e says, lookin' at me with 'is eyes runnin' tears—'e says, 'Yer mad coot,' he says, 'yer wayback silly blanker,' 'e says, 'that bloke's wax.' "

Another "dag"—a chap we had christened "Rabbie" because he had been a rabbit dealer before the war—gave us a further insight into the ways of the Aussey on leave from France.

Apparently he had chummed up with an individual of his own type who was on two weeks' furlough from the Somme regions, and who had evidently taken a delight in initiating the "reinforcement bloke" into recognized customs of "the coves who know the ropes."

"The first time I met 'im 'e was with a sheila 'e'd bin trackin' with—one 'e'd knew before in London," said Rabbie, "an' I 'adn't seen 'im fer years,—not since 'e use ter sell fish about Sydney,—well, 'e gives me a knock-down to 'is tart—yer know 'ow a bloke does when it's 'is cobber—never mentions no names er anything—'e says, givin' the intro—'Yer don't know 'im,' 'e says, an' ter me—'This is me tabbie,' an' ter her—'A bloke I know;' an' that's 'ow I met his sheila. Well, after the intro, we all went an' 'ad a drink,—the boozers wus just opened,—an' we're sittin' round the table an' I'm listenin' ter them talkin', an' then the tabbie says, lookin' at me cobber—an' I could see she was gorne a million on 'im—she says, 'But you won't go back to France, dear, will you?' she says. Me cobber 'e winks at me. 'Always at me ter be a neutral,' 'e says, larfin'. 'Wants me ter go adrift an' look after 'er.'

"An' fair dinkum she 'ad it all cut an' dry 'ow 'e should do it. She'd get 'im a suit of civvies an' a discharged soldier's badge, an' a job in a munition fact'ry, an' e'd live with 'er, an' 'ow much better that 'ud be than goin' back ter be slaughtered. An', mind yer, she 'ad a bloke she'd been married to, out in France. But she wus shook on this cobber uv mine, an' wanted 'im. Well, Gordblarmey, I

learnt more about everythin' down there in tha Coal Hole that afternoon than I'd ever learnt before, an' 'ow the sheilas work in with our blokes an' beat the Jacks an' that." The speaker paused to light a "yellow peril" and then proceeded:

"These clinas some'ow git passes an' take the ink out an' fill them in fresh, an' they got proper headquarters stamps—git these from blokes workin' there, an' yer can git a proper pass from a tabbie that no Jack could find fault with. And if yer want to, they can hide yer away fer weeks, in some little joint in the East End where they live. Then I 'eard about the stunts some uv our blokes work if they're in hospital or that, so's they can be sent out to Aussie. If yer don't want ter go acrors ter France, yer can fake yerself so's the quacks don't know that yer 'aven't got a crook heart or sine-vitas—least that's wot me cobber was tellin' me. 'E says if yer inject iodine inter the knee, or bind a penny on the leg just above yer knee, or bind a damp clorth round it an' tap it with yer fingers fer a few hours—these things all make yer knee get big by mornin', an' the M.O.'s don't know but what yer got sine-vitas, which means Aussie. There wus lots of other ways that I forgot since. An' then yer fake yer heart an' that by smokin' fags with a few drops uv iodine in them, or smoke one that's got a little sugar in it, or chew a bit uv cordite. Me cobber reckons that lots uv blokes got to Aussie by doin' these stunts, oney 'e says that the doctors are gettin' wise an' yer liable ter cum a gutser in two ways; yer might be landed fer tryin' ter fake yerself, an' yer might overdo the stunt an' fix yerself

fer life, or even peg out. 'E says that most uv the jokes is played out now, but they're always diggin' up new stunts ter work on the quacks, an' they've got all the symptoms off by heart, so's they can answer questions."

Somebody inquired from Rabbie what a "neutral" was. "Is it the term given to a chap who gets into 'civvies' after a period in khaki?" he was asked. "You mentioned it about your cobbler and his girl."

"A neutral," explained Rabbie, with a worldly air and a slight smile of scorn for anyone so unsophisticated as to ask such a question, "is a bloke who's fed up with soldierin', an' hops it, so's the Jacks can't trace 'im. 'E's called that 'coz 'e don't agree with one side or the other—'e's neutral. An' that reminds me uv two blokes wot got away from the O.T.B.¹ last week. I met them at Dirty Dick's—they'd oney just landed in London an' was tellin' us 'ow they beat the Jacks on the train. Said they 'ad no time fer goin' back ter France an' 'ad enough dough ter go adrift, so they hired a car and went round-ways to a station where the M.P.'s don't go, an' got on the train there. At another station farther on where the Jacks go through the train, these two blokes got out an' gave a kid a couple of deenahs ter tell the Jacks that there wus two fullers fightin' an' mad drunk—two Ausseys—at the very back end uv the train. This was just before the train was to pull out and when the M.P.'s 'ad done 'alf-way down. The kid runs an' tells the Johns, an' 'e's breathless an' excited, an' the

¹ Overseas Training Battalion.

Johns they run down ter see wot's doin'. Jus' then these two Ausseys, bein' in the carriage next ter be looked through, hops out an' up among the crowd and gets inter a compartment ahead. An' when the train pulls out, they leans out uv the carriage an' 'pokes it' at the Jacks. 'Struth! they seem ter like jeerin' an' pokin' borax at those blokes, an' can't resist it even if they gits caught—well, they laughs an' waves ter the Jacks, an' says ter them, 'Oh, good-by-ee youse Anzacs—youse gallant Austrilian defenders—youse cold-footed blankin' crimson crawlin' blankers, yez. Good-by-ee.'

"Course the Jacks they're mad as 'ell about it, an' the way the crowd laughed narked 'em worse, an' they rang up Waterloo, where the train would arrive without another stop, an' arranged with the Jacks there to catch these two blokes. Anyway, the train first pulled up just before gettin' ter Waterloo—'ad ter wait for the signals er somethin'—an' the neutrals lighted out an' come straight ter Dirty Dick's, where they got faked passes from a couple uv tabbies. Them diggers don't intend ter git caught fer a while."

These little side-lights on the doings of the more degenerate Ausseys who had soldiered in France were of considerable interest to us, and we welcomed any such stories chiefly because they contained a strong vein of humour in the telling, and also because there was such a human touch to them, and most of us wondered if any of our fellows would later on participate in similar episodes.

"When chaps go adrift, knowing that they must later on be caught and receive severe punishment for

'lighting out,' etc., how do they regard the prospect of paying so heavily for their sins?" inquired one of the draft, addressing Rabbie.

"'Struth, that's nothin'!" he exclaimed. "When they gits nabbed by the Jacks, they try ter bluff it out, an' when that won't work they nearly always do a bit uv a plead an' try ter get the Jacks a bit sympathetic, an' say ter the sargeant, 'Don't be too 'ard on a bloke, sarge,' an' if that's no good they just goes along quiet an' takes wot's comin' without makin' any fuss. Course now an' agin a bloke 'll give the Jacks a go fer it, but mostly they says, 'Oh, well,' they says, 'I've 'ad a good time—I ain't growlin'.' An' they do their little lot without squealin'. But most uv them tells the Jacks off when they find the sympathy touch won't work."

Thus were revealed to us the little idiosyncrasies of the boys whose greatest weakness of all was their lack of moral courage; and, if anyone had suggested to them that their lawlessness was hardly playing the game, they would no doubt point out that they were only getting their own back for some slight they had thought to have received from some one in authority. And their independent spirit and strong physical courage worked hand in hand, to the detriment of their conduct-sheet while not actually engaged in beating the stolid Hun.

As leave had been stopped for all men warned for draft, and we were not even allowed to go beyond the camp boundaries, there was plenty of time during the next few evenings for the draft to discuss the projected departure to France, and

every hut contained its quota of men whose main interest now centred in getting across to the real thing which they had come so many thousands of miles to experience. And to lend further interest to the approaching event, we met a sergeant and a corporal of the battalion which we would reinforce, who had been sent to England in order to relieve other N.C.O.'s of that battalion in "company" duty at the training battalion. These fresh arrivals had come across direct from the Somme Valley, where the battalion was in the line, and were able to give us first-hand information about the nature of the fighting and all manner of things that it would be handy for us to know.

It was really funny how various of our senior N.C.O.'s of the reinforcement would manœuvre affairs so as to get the ear of the newly-arrived sergeant, and extract from him every bit of information that might be of use to a new N.C.O. about to go overseas. Every one looked upon the "original" sergeant as a hero, and often he would have a crowd about him, listening eagerly and drinking in every word he uttered as though it was of inestimable value. How we also listened with envy to an exchange of reminiscences between him and one of the battalion sergeants he was to relieve, and who had been away six months from the battalion. They talked with the greatest familiarity about Armentières and Flers and the Somme, and never once were they mean enough to try and "put the wind up" any of their listeners. I have often since wondered how they managed to resist doing so, it being such a universal practice among old hands.

We learnt that it was a most unwise policy to carry anything but the barest necessities across from England, that such things as cholera belts, extra boots, extra clothing, would only be discarded on the first long march from rail-head, and that all soldiers who know things will always travel "light."

But most important of all was the news relating to the battalion itself. For the last two weeks it had been in the line—had moved up from rest billets into the trenches just in time to go over the top outside Bapaume, and was even now on the heels of Fritz some distance the other side of that much-damaged town, which had passed into British occupancy. And our brigade had been the first to enter Bapaume, after the Hun evacuation. Also there was every likelihood of a period of open warfare, which would be very much more acceptable than the trench system which had been in existence for so long.

"They're hunting Fritz's rear-guard and machine-gun nests out of a few villages scattered about in the region of the Bapaume-Cambrai Road," our informant stated, "and there's very little shell-fire now, to what there was. He seems to be withdrawing all his troops back to a strongly-prepared series of positions called the 'Hindenburg Line.'"

Thus we were made acquainted with the new phase of warfare that had developed, and we scanned the daily papers with threefold interest, and looked with pride upon the published photos of our own brigade which were taken when it entered Bapaume, and secretly gloated over the fact that we belonged to the men whose pictures we had

seen, showing them in their tin hats drinking hot soup amid the ruins of the town which two days previously had belonged to the enemy.

Yes ! Our enthusiasm at this stage of our active-service experience was a very wonderful thing, and men became as brothers in a common cause, which united us more strongly than ever, and filled each individual with the desire to exert the best that was in him in order that our reinforcement should more than hold its own with anything against which it might be pitted. And how soon our opportunity would come we little guessed, nor could we foresee the sudden and dramatic entry which was to be ours into the zone of mortal combat..

CHAPTER XXVIII

FRANCE

“**A**LL men of the draft will be ready for kit inspection in their respective huts,” was the order after battalion parade next morning. “You will spread out your kits according to the regulation plan I have here—it will be handed round, and every one must be ready by 10.30 a.m.,” said the company sergeant-major.

So we collected everything that was shown to be issued by our “Q 1” form and duly spread out the articles in the prescribed manner. Some of the fellows had lost or mislaid various parts of their gear, which, if such was discovered by the inspecting officer, would mean a reissue of the article and the entry of its price in the loser’s pay-book. This unpleasant sequel was easily defeated, however, by every one who was short of anything, since in each instance such articles would be temporarily borrowed from other men’s kits, and returned as soon as the inspection was over. In any case the inspecting officer hardly looked at the complete array of goods and chattels, merely inquiring of the owner as he stood to attention beside his “show,” “You quite

complete ? Short of anything ? ” And each man would answer briskly, “ All correct, sir.”

And although we had three different kit inspections before our departure, and which harassed us sorely, there was seldom anything missing, because one man’s jack-knife or field-dressing would often repose upon several different kits in turn, as the officer would approach first one and then another of them—the “ moving article ” flying deftly from hand to hand behind his back, and greeting him serenely among the next man’s “ issue.”

In the afternoon we paraded for the C.O.’s inspection. Every man was wearing all the equipment he would take with him to France, and we senior N.C.O.’s experienced a strong glow of pleasure at the show our draft made, and every one listened intently to the speech which the colonel delivered to the boys. After dismissal, we devoted most of our leisure time to the writing of letters, as there would be little opportunity for correspondence during the next few days, and many bare acquaintances in Aussie no doubt received long missives from unexpected correspondents in this way, for it seems to be a favourite pastime with departing units to renew acquaintances by post which had long since been almost forgotten.

By sundown the next day we were drawn up on parade and ready to march out to the railway station. Few of us who may survive this great war will readily forget our departure from the training camp at H——, that first definite step which led out to the battle-fields of France and

Belgium. We were not nervous, nor had we any misgivings as to what it should ultimately lead to ; just a sublime confidence in ourselves which manifested itself by the brightness of our eyes, the lightness of our step, and the full-throated bursts of song with which we entertained the villagers through whose precincts we passed, during any lull in the march-choruses played by the depot band at our head. Children and acquaintances made during our training-days joined in the march, only to drop out later and wave farewells as the little column continued on its way to the station where our special troop-train was in waiting. To hide any little sign of emotion at witnessing the last wave of fair hands, or the final hand-clasp of comrades and pals remaining behind, our boys would laugh and jest at whatever they could bring in as a distraction, but underlying it all a close observer would find a strong current of loneliness discernible among the more youthful of them, which was almost obscured by the high tide of excitement which flowed through every one on this momentous occasion.

We were carrying twenty-four hours' rations with us in little white bags, consisting of a tin of bully, four biscuits, and a tin of tea and sugar for each man. These were supplemented at the station by hot tea and sandwiches for all hands, and then we took our places in the various compartments of the train and threw off our packs and web equipment, and set about the various ways in which we would spend the next few hours.

There was hardly anyone to see us off beyond the depot band and a few stragglers, and as the train

pulled out we were either composing ourselves to slumber or else dealing the first hand in a game of bridge or poker. As the train rushed through the night, one by one we dropped off to sleep and only awoke when daylight found us speeding through the outskirts of the coastal town where we were to embark on the Channel steamer.

After the business of detraining and forming up outside the busy station, the column moved off along perfectly-graded roads lined on either side by boxed-in oak and other English trees, and now and then we caught a glimpse of the grey waters of the Channel. The wonderful blocks of residential buildings on either hand attracted our attention as we neared the billeting-area in which we were to stop until the next day, and then the unit turned in between "war" fences of galvanized iron and finally came to a halt opposite a pile of beautiful private residences and boarding-houses, long since evacuated by their former occupants and now used by the Government as temporary quarters for passing troops.

In this area British soldiers fairly swarmed. Reinforcements for kilted Scottish regiments mingled with units for the Guards, and troops from Newfoundland, Canada, South Africa, and Australia were billeted next to reinforcements for a dozen different Tommy battalions. We were able to note the general characteristics of the various classes of men, and it pleased us in no small degree to notice the general respect and approval with which we were greeted by all and sundry.

Shortly after noon on the following day found

us under way again, sandwiched into column-of-route between some "kilties" and a reinforcement for the Durham Light Infantry. As we emerged out into the boulevard above the water-front, a great sight met the eyes of those of our boys who had never before seen the English Channel. There it lay; a broad stretch of white-crested grey sea, with heavy banks of dark cloud apparently resting upon it out in the direction of France, and closer in the water was dotted with craft of all kinds. Below us lay the docks, at which we could observe the vessel which was to carry us to a foreign land where many journey and some do not return.

The usual halts occurred before our draft reached the big steamer which was straining on its hawsers beside the small wharf, and eventually we filed on board and took up our position in column-of-mass amidships on both upper and lower decks, and immediately threw off our equipment and put on life-belts in accordance with the orders for troops crossing.

A cold, sleety wind blew down Channel and swept across the crowded upper deck as we moved out from the wharf, and every one exposed to its icy blast delved into his pack for great-coat and muffler. Overhead, the sky was lowering and leaden-coloured, and on the weather side of the vessel great masses of spume-flecked sea bore down on us and lifted our craft with a creaking sway, or else expended their topmost fury against the steel plates in a great geyser of hard-flung sea-water and foam. The stays and rigging of the ship twanged with the force of the wind, which sang through them and

carried the black smoke from the funnels down to lo'ard in a widespread flat column.

Out beyond us a number of sea-birds wheeled in great sweeping circles, their wings extended in rigid line as they dipped this way and that, and low down among the combers we could discern the long, sinister shapes of a number of destroyers, their funnels belching great masses of grey and black smoke. Everywhere on all available decks of our ship were troops, some sitting on their packs and chewing chocolate, and others crowding in behind the shelter of funnels or boats. Sometimes a shower of sea-spray would hurl itself down upon them, which caused a scurry to some more sheltered bit of deck already packed with khaki-clad men.

As we moved out and headed away for our French port, a number of destroyers ranged themselves on either side and kept with us during the entire crossing. Above in the drifting and hurrying cloud-banks a big sea-plane kept ceaseless watch for enemy submarines, driving through the mists of vapour and gradually forging ahead as we neared the port at which we were to disembark. The sun, until now completely obscured by the cloud-banks, threw golden beams across to us from the distant horizon as the ship tied up to the wharf of this busy foreign seaport. Then came a period of waiting until it should be our turn to file down the gangway and form up alongside the railway sheds which ran parallel with the docks.

The shaded street-lamps and the lights from hurrying trams and vehicular traffic shone on wet

pavements and glistening cobbles as we followed our "conducting" officer in a compact column-of-fours along in the direction of the camp some little distance out of the town. There was a decided foreign touch to the scene, as we tramped along under our loaded packs and ground-sheet-covered rolled blankets. In the first place, we marched on the right of the road, on an uneven *pavé* that led through quaint, densely-inhabited areas where the proprietors of *estaminets* and small shops gave us disinterested glances and then resumed the serving of customers with much unintelligible chatter and foreign gesticulation. And, secondly, we were appealed to by numerous French or Flemish girls to buy "chocolate, monsieur, bon chocolate, Ostralia"; and occasionally the draft received a languid wave from some fat dame sitting on her doorstep surrounded by a swarm of gabbling youngsters who would cease their play for a brief moment to stare at us and utter their "Bon, Ostralia; you gimme souvenir, m'sieur?" in shrill and not unattractive voices.

The rain commenced to descend in torrents as we tramped on and up the hill on the fringe of the town.

"Hell! This is Mount Ararat," one of the boys remarked ere we reached the top.

It was not until later that we found the hill already christened. "One Blanket" Hill was the name bestowed upon it by former drafts, and the significance of this name we fully understood before leaving its locality next day for a further stage of our journey to the battalion.

When you are wet through, chilled, and dog-tired, the prospect of turning in under a leaky bell-tent with merely a ground-sheet and two blankets as a protection against cold is not the most inviting suggestion in the world. Such an aspect confronted us as we halted before a flat stretch of ground upon which were scores of grey, rain-sodden bell-tents, while the downpour grew in intensity and converted the immediate area into a vast sheet of yellow water.

"The parade will move off by reinforcements to the various lines, under the supervision of staff N.C.O.'s, after which every man will be issued with one blanket, and orderlies will be detailed and will report to the cook-house for candles, tea, and rations. No man is to leave the camp under any conditions, and reveille will sound at 6.30 to-morrow morning." So stated one of the camp officers.

After seeing to the issue of blankets and tents, we senior N.C.O.'s paraded our orderlies and drew the necessary "grub," etc., and when the troops had been fed we secured our own quota of smoked tea, bully, and biscuits, and groped our way to a tent. It is astonishing how a drink of hot tea and a feed of bully beef and hard biscuits will put new life into a tired soldier. We were even cheerful after the meal, and turned in under dripping canvas with many a laugh at each other's frequently recurring attempts to dodge some fresh trickle from our water-logged roof. It was soon after reveille next morning that we learnt about our unit's manner of complying with the orders relating to stopping in camp the previous evening. The

information was conveyed to us by a shearer, the one who had depicted a shearing-shed on the "leave" trip to London, and whom we had since christened "Hungry" on account of his voracious appetite. Clean-shaven and bright of eye, Hungry sauntered into our tent just as we had lit our morning cigarettes, and with the good-humour of a man who knows that he will not be rebuffed seated himself on a pack and gave us an outline of his last night's adventures.

"Bon mornin'," he exclaimed, lighting a proffered "capstan." "Youse sergeants missed the fun lars' night, didn't yer?"

"What fun, Hungry?" we demanded. "If you call the rain——"

"Thought yer wouldn't compree," he interrupted with a grin. "Rain nothin'. Most uv us went inter Boolong fer the night."

"Oh, did you! Without a pass? Didn't you get caught?"

Our visitor laughed.

"Pass?—Caught? Not in these trousers, major." He settled himself back for a long yarn, smiling at certain recollections of his recent experiences. "Yer remember wot a cow of a night lars' night was, and 'ow we oney got one measly little blanket ter go with our own,—an' two blankets an' a waterproof sheet ain't much use agin rain an' cold,—and nothin' ter eat but tea an' bully?"

"But you're on active service, Hungry. Lots of fellows up in the——"

Hungry couldn't tolerate comparisons which would put him at a disadvantage.

"But we ain't up in the line yit," he broke in. "Time enough then. And who was going ter sleep under tents wot leaked like wet clothes? Not for ours, major. Besides, a bloke likes ter see wot's wot when 'e camps near a Froggie town for the furst time. An' we compreed about stayin' in camp—that was oney a bluff. No bon for mine."

"Just a moment!" I exclaimed, amused at the shearer's careful pronunciation of one or two newly-acquired French words. "Where did you learn to say 'bon' and 'compre'e'?"

Hungry's face expanded in a grin.

"That's the madameaselle learnt me them," he said.

"Oh! Yes, tell us all about your little outing."

"Well, furst thing we done, a mob uv us filled our pockets with tins uv bully an' biscuits an' then lit out, an' one bloke dug up an old orficer's cap 'e 'ad in 'is pack, an' put it on. We was all wearin' our great-coats, and w'en we got out on the road the bloke wearin' the cap 'e formed us up in fours an' marched us inter tha town—past the Red Caps an' all. Was kiddin' we was a draft in charge uv an orficer, an' then we dismissed ourselves an' went explorin'. Me an' me cobber went into a boozer—*estaminets* they was—an' the joint was full uv Tommies an' Jocks, an' a few old Froggies. 'Ad some wine—vin blong—but it tasted like—like gin's 'air-wash, an' we changed ter stout—'stoot' the Froggies call it. Was there fer a while an' then tried a few other places, an' at larst we met a couple uv madameaselles that compreed English. Took them in ter 'ave some corfee an' ended up by

makin' them 'ave some fried eggs an' spuds with us—an' we got more vin, oney this time it was red. There was a good crowd uv blokes—soldiers an' civvies, an' some sheilas, feedin' an' drinkin', an' a bonzer little orchestra playin' rag-time an' that. We was feelin' prime, then, an' tha tabbies got quite lovin'——"

Hungry paused to light a fresh cigarette from the butt of his old one.

"And all this time you had your pockets full of bully and biscuits?" inquired a sergeant.

"Course we 'ad," replied Hungry. "I'm comin' ter tha part where these things come in so handy. Yer see, we 'ad oney a few bob, an' it was all gorne by tha time we'd fixed up fer the feed uv spuds an' 'en's fruit—an' tha shicker. Anyway we goes out with tha tabbies, an' they wanted us ter go to a dance at some joint they knew uv. So me an' me cobber goes off with them, an' we're walkin' down a narrer street, on the bumpy cobbles,—me cobber an' 'is girl in front,—an' just as we're passin' a dark alleyway a bloke snatches the little 'and-bag uv the madameaselle in front, an' 'e's scalin' off like 'ell down another alley. The bloke was wearin' a Tommy's uniform, an' I'm after 'im soon's I spotted what 'e'd done. An' 'e could run, that bloke, an' knocked a boy over wot was in his way. An' I'm not gainin' on 'im too well, an' then I feels fer a tin uv bully, an' just as 'e's about ter turn a corner I swipes 'im on the ear with the bully—a dinkum good shot—an' 'e goes down. Course I got the bag an' took 'is belt fer a soovneer. 'Ave a look at it." And Hungry unbuckled a broad belt from his

waist, an "equipment" belt literally covered with numerous Imperial badges, and handed it to us for inspection.

"Yes ; go on, Hungry," we urged, after examining the prize with covetous eyes. "What happened after that ?"

Hungry smiled with joyful recollection.

"I left the Tommy bloke sittin' up, an' feelin' 'is head," he replied. "An' when I gave tha tabbie 'er bag she put 'er arms round me neck an' kissed me, an' got so excited she jabbered away in 'er lingo—parleyin' French, an' then kissed me some more."

"Yes ?"

"Yes, an' I'm feelin' such a coote, 'coz the others was lookin' on, an' a few old dames was eyein' us off too. So I drags me cobber off, an' the sheilas too, an' they takes us to the joint where the dance was. Sparemedays, it was some place. An' there was a lot uv our blokes there, drinkin' an' dancin' an' that. An' the madame wanted two francs ter let us in, at furst ; but we're both broke, an' so I pulls out me other tins uv bully, an' tha biscuits, an' gives them to 'er, an' tha French piece wot owned tha bag she says somethin' in Froggie langwedge to the madame an' points ter me an' shows tha bag, an' we all pass in, old madame bowin' an' smilin' like a blankey mayor. Gotter cigarette ter spare, sarge ?" After lighting up, Hungry proceeded with his story.

"We 'ad a great time fer a while, oney some big bloke belongin' ter tha Royal Field Artillery starts bullyin' one uv our blokes over a sheila, an' makes a

swing at 'im. But 'e missed an' got a boshter punch on tha jaw fer 'is pains from our bloke; an' that started a rough-house, in which Tommies an' Ausseys got busy with each other. We fixed 'em up, though, an' the ole madame then orders them to pull their frames, an' then we got the joint to ourselves. 'Ad a couple wv dances arfter that, an' then I sees the madameaselle home—an'—an'—'ere I am." Hungry concluded his experience with a noticeable hesitation.

"You've skipped the best part of the yarn, Hungry. 'An' here I am' doesn't account for everything from the time you went to see the lady home," a sergeant remarked. "Did she entertain you at home?"

Hungry made a burlesque of a French girl's "coy" expression. "'Appres le guerre, monsieur,'" he replied. "That's what she kept on sayin'—'appres le guerre.'"

CHAPTER XXIX

GOING TO THE BASE

EVERY man was present to answer the roll-call after breakfast, and without any disturbing preliminaries we saddled ourselves with our packs and things and moved out of "One Blanket" depot *en route* to the Boulogne Railway Station.

As our small column wormed its way through the town, any close observer amongst us could have gathered sundry impressions, from the various attitudes of the people whom we passed, concerning the Australians. Individuals and groups would sometimes stop and regard us with evident approval, some even waving encouragement, and others talking gaily among themselves and pointing to our big burly fellows in the leading fours. French soldiers in soiled blue-grey uniforms, and looking somewhat disreputable, eyed us in stolid silence, and small parties of Tommies, always neatly dressed, stopped to watch us with unfeigned interest. But the youngsters showed the keenest pleasure in our little procession—precocious brats of both sexes joining in an impromptu march beside the boys,

and some of the more lusty ones were delighted at being allowed to carry a rifle here and a haversack there.

Nobody sang "Tipperary," as did our predecessors of 1914, but at least most of us thought of the gallant "Old Contemptibles" and their inspiring march through Boulogne during those exciting days prior to the retreat from Mons.

At the railway station we found another column of Ausseys and some detachments of Tommies, waiting, as we would have to wait, for a train. Tremendous activity prevailed in the station itself—troops of all kinds were everywhere. Mingled in a sea of khaki was the blue-grey of French soldiers, relieved here and there by the bright and showy uniforms of Zouaves and other distinguished regiments of the great Republic, and British and French staff officers and R.T.O.'s introduced a further contrast by their red and gold cap decorations and their wonderfully perfect riding breeches and boots.

Our packs and equipment had been serving us as seats for over half an hour when word was given to prepare for entraining. Some minutes later a long line of open trucks and horse-trucks backed in alongside our particular platform, so we sat down again, since there seemed to be no troop-train attached to either end of the string. On the doors and sides of the trucks were various letterings in French and much smudged writing and figures in white chalk. Some of the boys whose French had been neglected were puzzled to know what NORD—HOMMES 38—CHEVAUX 6 meant; but before the

significance of the words could be explained, a proper troop-train pulled in on the other edge of the platform, and disgorged a crowd of French soldiers, and we gathered our traps and followed a young staff officer to take the vacated compartments. But no sooner had we settled ourselves than instructions came to remove ourselves and get into the right train—"the one over there." What! Horse, cattle, and coal trucks! Convinced of some staff blunder, the boys resigned themselves to the latest order, and amid much laughter and a little sultry blasphemy we crowded into the "freighter." It seemed an hour before the thing threatened to start, and then it only pulled out for a couple of hundred yards, and we had a splendid vista of dirty-looking back-yards and tenement buildings. Although crowded together, some of the fellows tried to sleep during the long wait. A cold wind whistled between the trucks, and every sound outside seemed to be subdued to those who occupied the horse-trucks and had shut the sliding doors. But you know what it is with those French railways. Just as you're drowsy and your head is beginning to nod, a most frightful grinding and crashing commences a long way off and comes nearer and nearer, until you hold your breath as your part of the train gets under way. This it accomplishes by suddenly crashing and banging into the part ahead, only to be in turn similarly dealt with by the part in rear, and the violence of the whole manoeuvre makes you wonder what sort of driver is on the footplate. But we were at least on the move again, and after clanking along over numerous points,

past long railway-sheds where groups of women in overalls were working, we eventually entered the open country.

The season being late winter, the rural scenery was devoid of anything approaching beauty, and but slightly differed from English farming country. Beyond a large windmill or two and the presence of old and young women working in the fields, and the lines of tall leafless trees bordering the highways, there was nothing of interest to attract our attention. At every railway crossing in the tiny hamlets through which we travelled there was a small-sized, elderly and heavily-moustached French soldier leaning on his rifle, guarding the right of way. As the train crept—not sped—past the first of these sentries, some of the boys tried to impale tins of bully on the point of his long bayonet, which action produced an expansive smile from the old fellow and the bland “Bon jour, messieurs, merci boko, trey bon bully bif, merci; au revoir.” Which suggested that on countless former occasions the same thing had been repeated, and one wondered how many such tins these soldiers already had stored away in their billet or home.

By dint of chewing chocolate, munching biscuits, and discussing the various features along the route, we managed to pass the time without suffering undue boredom, and when a long hospital train passed, its white sides resplendent at intervals with huge red crosses, and its interior a mass of wounded British Tommies, our excitement began to grow and we leaned out of trucks and cheered those heroes with the enthusiasm of a pack of

schoolboys. Then did we realize that we were getting on to the edge of things—so to speak; and this belief was cemented half an hour later, when the train crawled past a number of Hun soldiers, who were working on the line under a French guard.

Spotting these men ere the train reached them, almost everybody who could do so crowded to the side upon which we would pass the prisoners, to get an "eyeful" of real dinkum Fritzes and to hurl good-natured (?) remarks at them.

"Hallo, Fritz!" from some.

"You Fritzie b——s!" from others.

"We're goin' ter git yer cobbors, yer blankers!" from more earnest individuals—the words being accompanied by the disclosure of a naked bayonet, shaken at the group.

But, like the French sentries, these men were now used to this sort of thing, and they displayed no uneasiness—just a stolid stare here and a smile there; and they looked well and hearty in their grey uniforms and flat circular caps.

"Wonder where the blankers were captured?" was queried among our fellows.

With nothing further to interest us beyond a few more stops, for which we could suggest no reason, the train finally drew in alongside a small platform apparently set down in the heart of a large area of sand-dunes, with the sea just visible a few miles away to the right. This was Étapes—the Australian Base, and our destination for the time being. Everywhere in the vicinity was a con-

glomeration of huts, marquees, and tents, with a group of hospital buildings and marquees farther along behind the station.

It took us fifteen minutes to detrain and form up, and then began the march to our divisional training battalion area. Luckily, this was only a short distance away, but before reaching it every man passed through a building and received at express speed a new rifle smeared with oil and petroleum jelly, and a bayonet and scabbard, which were to be his own henceforth for use against the King's enemies.

The task of allotting us to the bell-tents which were to serve as our sleeping-quarters was soon disposed of, and the unit was dismissed after listening to Camp Orders read by a sergeant-major of the training battalion staff. What with the job of ridding our rifles of grease and oil, having tea, and going to the camp cinema, the hours between our arrival in camp and "lights out" passed quickly enough, and everybody turned in with thankfulness, for we had lost some valuable sleep during the preceding three nights, and one wasn't sure what the morrow might bring forth.

Our second morning in France opened with a cloudless sky, and the sun was just beginning to show over the horizon of sand-hills as we formed up for a brisk route-march without equipment, as an appetizer before breakfast. After the meal was over, the reinforcement paraded for medical inspection, was pronounced medically fit, and then began the issuing to us of everything a soldier takes with him up the line. These supplementary items

were interesting. Included among the new articles was a P.H. helmet. This was really a grey flannel-ette bag to go over the head, with eye-pieces and a mouth-piece for exhalation only, and, as the material of the helmet was damp with some strong chemical preparation, the subsequent gas-drill with this monstrosity was anything but a pleasant ordeal.

Then came a box respirator, another contrivance for the neutralizing of enemy gas. This was a canvas square-shaped bag or box, containing a mask and a tin affair of some sort, which would be suspended round the neck and tied upon your chest when entering dangerous territory—the mask to be worn over the face when gas was “on.” The third article was a steel helmet, like a deep iron basin, with some sort of hat-band arrangement clewed to the inside and a strong chin-strap to keep the “lid” from wobbling when being worn. The acquisition of this tin hat was a great event to many of the fellows, for such paraphernalia was never seen in the possession of men unless they had been in the line or thereabouts, or were just about to travel in that direction. And the serving to everybody of 280 rounds of ball ammunition completed the hall-marking of our unit for an early taste of Hun-chasing. Additional underclothes, a rifle-cover, a packet of cigarettes, a pull-through, and “emergency rations” were the remainder of our full issue to every man, and having duly received all this “truck,” we retired to our respective tents to adjust things—fill our pouches with ammunition, mark our own articles with indelible pencil, etc. etc., which carried us over until midday.

After dinner we marched to the Bull-ring—the training-ground of the camp—for further instruction in gas-drill, and to test the efficacy of our gas appliances. At the Bull-ring we saw numerous squads of Australians “working.” Some were doing physical jerks, others at bombing practice, further squads on bayonet fighting. And from the range adjacent to the locality came the rattle of rifle-fire and the crisp bark of many Lewis and Vickers machine-guns. Everywhere one looked, bunches of Australians were earnestly engaged in one or other of the numerous practices necessary to the qualifying of an infantry soldier for front-line work, and, were any civilian resident of the Commonwealth to be suddenly dumped down in the midst of this animated and somewhat grim scene, his heart could not fail to swell with pride at the sight of such numbers of his countrymen—young, healthy fellows—working so hard away in a foreign country, to fit themselves for the strenuous times ahead.

Our gas-drill, which included the novel action of stopping in a gas-filled chamber with our masks on, was completed in less than an hour, and we marched back from the area of trenches, bagged and trenched bayonet courses, and other dull features to the more homely and peaceful area of huts and tents, glad to get away from reminders of “work” which by now had utterly lost its novelty on account of its beastly familiarity.

No sooner had we returned to camp than we were informed that our reinforcement would proceed up the line to join the battalion next morning. What news ! What wonderful luck !

As I write now, after twelve months of hardship and fighting, wounds and hospitals, it seems incredible that we should have evinced such tremendous joy upon learning the great news. And yet it is perfectly true. The fellows went among each other shaking hands and demonstrating in all sorts of ways their pleasure at the announcement, and all felt that from now on, at least, we wouldn't be shy and afraid to open our mouths when associating with the men who had seen the "dinkum" fighting. There were many of these fellows in the camp—chaps who in most cases had recovered from wounds and were now employed on staff duty. Even quite recent arrivals from the line were down at our base, and some of the reinforcement imagined that these tried men looked upon them as overgrown boys who would later wake up, and who were as yet totally unsophisticated in regard to war. Now it was different, and our chaps, keen to learn anything new, mingled with the others and listened with interest to everything they had to say.

Our last night at the Base seemed to be the occasion for a revival of that purely Australian atmosphere with which so many of our fellows were familiar. This thought struck me as I joined a large group of our unit which had congregated for yarn-spinning upon one of the sand-dunes some little distance out of camp. The talk was all about Aussie and what the folks left behind would be doing, and it was impossible to refrain from wondering how many of the stalwart men discussing their home-life would eventually live to return to the scenes which were so very dear to them. Even the

raucous voices of a couple of Tommy "house" manipulators, with their ever-jarring calls of "legs elev-in—clickety-click—forty-seven—eighty-two—ninety-nine—top o' the 'ouse," and so forth, failed to disturb the harmony of the little bit of Commonwealth which had settled for a last evening's corroboree before entering the most vital stage of its journey to the Great Adventure.

"The ole bloke 'll be just about gettin' back now from the Farmers' an' Settlers' Meetin' in tha township," one youngster was saying: "An' 'e'll be stoppin' alorng the road ter yarn with Bill Smith about 'is ewes an' 'is missus an' tha new kid is both doin' better. Great ole bloke ter keep in with the neighbours—me farther."

"That's like my old man," went on another. "He bought a Ford car two years ago—after we'd had a good season—reckoned that he'd save its price in time becörze we live so far out from everywhere. And I'll never forget how Ma looked when she had her first ride in it; had never been in one before, an' she looked out of place. But it wasn't a month before she had developed that 'superior' air which you so often see on people who aren't used to motors, an' she'd feel so sorry for her neighbours who had to jog into the township behind the slow old nag. I uster tease the Mater about the 'dog' she used to put on every time she went out. But the Dad was the best fun. He bought the Ford so's it ud save him an hour or two on the road an' give him a chance to be in time for the F. and S. or the Council Meeting. But it made no difference, because he'd allow himself all the longer at home, and would

get to the township about an hour late for his old meeting."

"That's generally the way," another speaker interposed. "All you cockeys are the same. Spare-medays, I never knew the cockey yet that was early fer a meetin'—generally they an' their missuses drag in hours after startin' time."

"Speakin' uv Aussie," put in a fourth, "did yer ever read the lines of a bloke who wrote about the back country during a drought? Must a' known it pretty well. 'E said—wot was it—oh yes :

Where men an' sheep an' cattle that die
Are quickly devoured by the awful fly ;
An' the crows fly backwards because they're wise,
To keep the dust from outer their eyes ;
Where the wallabies make such a crooked track
That a man 'going out' meets himself 'coming back,'

and so on. The bloke wot wrote that must a' bin on a jag—'ad the 'orrors."

There was a general laugh at the speaker's droll way of putting things.

"And yet he might have been correct, Jim," exclaimed an ex-lawyer among the group. "You know there's something uncanny about the back country of Australia. I was reading Marcus Clarke's lines about it only last night—in an introduction to Gordon, and he puts it somehow like this : 'Of the great Never Never, that vast uninhabited tract of country on the fringes of which live the population, we know but little. The men from outback, from the inner edge of the fringe, declare that even their environment is melancholy. The forests and

mountains chill the stranger with their desolate harshness. They are funereal, secret, stern. Their solitude is desolation. They seem to stifle in their black gorges a story of sullen despair. No tender sentiment is nourished in their shade. In the forests no leaves fall. From the tall white gums strips of hard bark hang and rustle. The very animal life of the frowning hills is either grotesque or ghostly. Great grey kangaroos hop noiselessly over the coarse grass. Flights of white cockatoos stream out from the tops of gum or box, shrieking like evil souls. The sun sinks and the mopokes burst out into horrible peals of semi-human laughter. During the scorching day-time the trees offer no shade, seeming to resent anything that might produce ease. The lonely horseman riding between the moonlight and the day sees vast shadows creeping across the shelterless and silent plains, hears strange noises in the primeval bush. And yet the dweller on the edge of these things becomes familiar with the beauty of loneliness as it is here,' and so on."

"Gordstruth! You must 'ave a memory, George!" said Hungry, who was enjoying everything that would take him back even for a moment to his beloved country. "An' yet yer gits the thing off as it is, oney I reckon tha bloke wot wrote it meant the old kookaburra an' not the mopoke. Oney larfin' jackasses does wot he thinks mopokes does."

"Speakin' of larfin' jackasses reminds me of the way a bloke larfed at me in London when I was on leave," volunteered a tall bushman. "'Ad the

same sort of quick way as them birds, an' fair reminded me of them—thought I was back scrub-cuttin'."

"What did he laugh at you for?" inquired one of the gathering.

The bushman let his eye rove over the group of interested listeners, as though doubtful of their sincerity, but sure of their ability to rag. At last he replied, with just a trace of defiance in his drawl:

"It was when I furst took on a ride in those blanky Underground trains. Went inter tha station and got a ticket ter some place—I fergit now where it was—an' got on a train. I lorst me ticket some'ow, an' couldn't remember wot station I 'ad ter git out at, so I figures on gettin' back ter the station I started from an' there was I ridin' round an' round fer a matter uv three hours before I could remember wot station I got in at, an' when I gets back to it, blimey, I was fair lorst, 'coz the tabbie wot served me with the ticket swore she didn't remember me an' couldn't remember wot ticket I arst for, an' a bloke waitin' near me was eyein' me off an' listenin', an' then the blanker larfed like a coot."

"She must 'ave been kiddin' to yer, Joe," shouted a man from the edge of the group. "There isn't a female in London but wot would remember your dial an' all about yer, once they saw yer at close quarters. Garn! D'yer think yer the King, or Dorothy Brunton, or General Birdwood, that anybody 'd remember——"

"I'll be a king fer you, Long'n, if yer like ta

hop yer frame out," challenged the bushman good-naturedly.

"Don't," protested several voices, "don't, Bushey. We want everybody to-morrow. Got a little business engagement with Fritz, yer know."

CHAPTER XXX

ALBERT

THE continuation of our journey to rail-head was resumed next morning in bitterly cold weather. Packed into horse-trucks with several other reinforcements, and on this our first occasion armed to the teeth, we jolted and bumped our way out of Étaples station without so much as a farewell handwave or a cheer from the disinterested groups in the vicinity. Quite an ordinary everyday affair, this departure of troops for the actual war zone, apparently, and so unlike the first "active-service" railway journey we had experienced, when every factory and workshop between Menangle and Sydney had turned out its crowds to wave us *bon voyage*, and every locomotive and steam whistle close to the line had tooted and cock-a-doodle-do'd its encouragement.

However, we were not in the least depressed at making such an unostentatious departure. The only effect it had upon us was to instil into each man the sort of sang-froid that is characteristic among men going up to the line for the second or

third time, and we tried to assume the same non-chalant attitude, with but varying success.

As on former occasions nobody in the reinforcement could state with any authority the name of the rail-head where we would detrain. Some declared the place to be Albert, and others argued that our journey ended on the edge of the Somme Valley. In our blissful ignorance of the country's geography, we could not define the one from the other or know that each statement was the correct one.

For the greater part of our journey, there was nothing to interest the boys beyond a few groups of Hun prisoners working on the line, and the overtaking or passing of long trains of shells and field artillery, with occasional trucks of new duckboards and other trench paraphernalia sandwiched in between six-inch howitzers and truck-loads of innocent-looking, live shells.

A feature which became more prominent, as we journeyed on, was the tremendous number of empty bully-beef tins deposited on both sides of the railway line. These tins were eloquent in the silent story they told, of countless men who had gone up to battle just as we were going, and who by now would be—well, probably many of them were lucky and had long since returned to Blighty, with thrilling stories of the experiences they had undergone in France.

After passing through Abbeville, which we could see from our trucks was a fair-sized town, the train came to a halt in the far end of the station yard, and word was passed along that we would eat. So

orderlies were detailed and sent to the Q.M.'s truck to draw rations of bully, biscuits, cheese, tea, and sugar, though how we were going to boil the tea nobody knew. This question was finally and speedily solved by some one who had a brain-wave. Luckily he was one of our own men, and we didn't grasp his purpose until he had secured four or five of our dixies with the necessary sugar and tea in them, and also two tins of bully, and had departed in haste towards the engine. There he gesticulated and bargained with the French driver for a few moments, and ultimately returned to our truck minus the bully beef, but with every dixie giving forth a pleasant steam and the agreeable odour of newly-boiled tea.

As we munched at the hard fare and sipped from the welcome brew, we watched representatives from almost every other truck speeding away towards our own engine and another on a side line, with their loads of dixies, and their bully beef. Such is the way of the Australian soldier.

Resuming our journey soon after lunch, the train passed through a number of small hamlets and some rather attractive farming country before we reached Amiens, a busy city on one of the waterways of France. Here we caught our first glimpse of the Somme River, which at this point fed a network of irrigation canals on the outskirts of the city and materially assisted in the cultivation of wide areas of vegetables, whereon worked many old and young women and a few boys. Sparsely-grassed undulating country on our right and the thickly-wooded bed of the Somme River on our left constituted the

principal scenery, until the train stopped about a mile out of Albert. It was then four o'clock in the afternoon, and snow had commenced to fall. This, however, was of short duration, and it did not prevent the majority of the soldiers from scrambling out to ease their cramped limbs, and fresh interest was awakened amongst us when somebody discovered a few isolated shell-holes out some distance from the railway, and there was a rush to examine them at close quarters. The more enterprising of our fellows, after a casual glance at these old evidences of grim battle, gathered armfuls of empty bully-beef tins and practised themselves in bomb-throwing from one hole into another, until a squeak from our engine warned us that the train was about to continue on its journey. So we made a rush back to our respective "sleepers" and pulled ourselves on board.

There is a considerable bend in the line some little distance beyond where we had practised bomb-throwing, and until the train had negotiated this the town of Albert was hidden from view by a string of low hills on our right. Now, however, rounding this bend, we caught our first glimpse of Hun frightfulness. Standing out from a desolation of shell-smitten buildings, every roof of which appeared to be torn open by high-explosive, was the well-known cathedral, Notre-Dame, with its beautiful statue of the Madonna and Child leaning out at a weird right-angle from the pile of damaged masonry. We felt it to be an historic moment in our lives—this viewing at close range the awful ravages of enemy explosives. What a sight! What utter wanton-



HE RETURNED TO OUR TRUCK WITH THE DIXIES

TO VNU
ALABAMA

ness and destruction ! So this was the sort of thing modern war meant.

As the train drew in alongside what had once been an up-to-date French railway station, but now consisted principally of crumbling brick walls minus roofs and windows, we were able to get a closer and more detailed view of the much battered town. Evidently prior to the war this centre of a large agricultural district had been a busy locality. From the station we could see blocks of buildings containing shops, *estaminets*, cafés, and residential hotels, now pierced through and through by shells and only recognizable by the French lettering still to be seen amid the wreckage. While gazing at the ruins, absorbed in a mental picture of what it must have meant to live in such a place during the process of destruction, we received orders to gather our belongings together and form up in column outside the station area. A guide from somewhere attached himself to the officer in charge, and then we were on the march, headed towards the cathedral.

As we progressed on our way, the scenes through which we passed roused our interest to such an extent that our heavy equipment and packs were entirely forgotten. Everywhere in each narrow cobble-paved street, British troops fairly swarmed. Most of them were steel-hatted Tommies off duty, who eyed us in stolid unconcern as we threaded our way past lines of mule transport and big Army motor-waggon. The sight of many groups of Australians, some with steel hats and others wearing the turned-up sombrero, and all more or less war-stained beings, was the most cheering item of all,

and the greatest good-humour was evidenced in our mutual salutations.

"Ho, you diggers! Come to push the Hun back? Good! We want all you boys. How's Aussie?"

"Oh, Aussie, it's Gord's country, mate. Wouldn't a' left it oney we're pleased with the work youse blokes 'ave done, an' we're come ter give yer a 'and. Wot's it like up the line?"

"Pretty solid, digger. Easy enough when yer used to it, though. So-long. See yer ter-night."

"Hope so. So-long, youse——"

A great siege-gun drawn by a steam tractor thrust itself between us and our battle-grimed countrymen, and the noise of its passing drowned all other sounds. A moment later we emerged into a square and then proceeded along a street immediately in front of the cathedral, which on closer view proved to be a tremendous edifice, and we noticed how enemy shells had gone through the roof and burst among the lofty upper regions, causing great rents in the masonry and exposing to view a conglomeration of twisted iron girders. The leaning statue, which projected straight out over the street, and was prevented from falling by a cunningly contrived arrangement of steel girders at its base, loomed above our heads in truly gigantic proportions, and seemed to be threatening every second to fall upon us, so acute was the angle at which it was maintained.

Huge shell-holes half filled with mud and debris were everywhere evident as we trudged on toward the outskirts of the town, and it is interesting to

note that of all the buildings—warehouses, shops, dwelling-houses, and tiers of what looked like tenement houses—there was only one structure which seemed to have escaped the blasting mark of modern high-explosive.

Farther out we passed a civilian cemetery, and beyond it an expanse of turf studded with freshly turned up mounds of yellow clay, each with its simple little wooden cross—mute testimony to the creed of men who would not wilt before a horde of savage barbarians.

Our unit was now marching on the Montauban road—one of the main arteries leading through the Somme Valley in the direction of Delville Wood—and all along the highway was a seemingly endless line of howitzer guns and limbers, camouflaged in green and yellow paint, and evidently awaiting transportation to some sector where their hidden forces would be utilized to the best advantage.

Ten minutes later we had turned off to the right and had entered the muddy precincts of what proved to be a rest camp, situated at a farm about a mile out from Albert. Squelching through the mud and clay of the roadway, past innumerable Nissen huts with their low, curved iron roofs, we finally wheeled to the left and halted before an outlying group of these buildings. Here the reinforcement was to rest for the night, to resume its march to the battalion on the morrow. So we were not slow in shedding our equipment and stowing it in the respective huts, and within half an hour the men were consuming hot tea and the inevitable soldier's

menu of bully and biscuits. After the meal we sallied forth in twos and threes to explore in detail the wastage created by German artillery. From some Australian convalescents at the rest camp, most of whom had been sent down from the line suffering from trench feet, we learnt that this camp was called Bell-View Farm, that it was a rotten place to be domiciled in, and that reinforcements usually went to the reinforcement camp just across the road, but evidently the tents over there must be full up. Also, that Albert afforded little excitement beyond a picture-show, a Y.M.C.A. concert, and a canteen where one could get a fairly respectable feed for five francs.

With this latter information as the greatest incentive, we wended our way past the cemeteries again and into the town.

It was obvious that many of the ruined buildings had been meagrely patched up with boards and hessian in order to serve as billets for troops. From within their cracked and often gaping walls an odour was emitted of hot Maconochie, or pork and beans, with here and there a glowing brazier surrounded by a group of unshaven but quite cheerful Tommies.

Drifting past the various "dwellings," we at length reached the Rue de Something or other, where were situated the cinema and the Y.M.C.A. The first house of the pictures was evidently about to begin, to judge from the long queue of British soldiers waiting patiently for the doors to be opened. After much inquiry from the ubiquitous Ausseys to be seen lounging about the main thoroughfares, we eventually arrived at the canteen near the railway

station and ordered eggs, bread and butter, and tinned peaches, with cocoa-au-lait to follow. Also we bought some "Greys" cigarettes and asked numerous questions.

The town of Albert, we were told, being some miles in rear of the Somme front, which was entirely garrisoned by British soldiers, had naturally developed into an important centre for the organization of British troops and equipment for that particular front, and in fact the town itself had been under long-range shell-fire from Boche artillery only a week or two back. But now Fritz had taken himself off to blazes away from the Somme Valley, and only his aeroplanes ventured over occasionally, to drop their rotten apples on the railway or billets. Yes, the Australians had done good work on the Somme, ever since Pozières, and even now they were right up against Hindenburg's outposts the other side of Bapaume. But it was a rotten trek between Albert and Bapaume—a vile march for infantry.

"Yer pore blighters. I don't 'arf envy yer—I don't think—'umpin' yer blinkin' packs across Devil's Wood, over them greasy duckboards fer a matter uv twenty 'killers,' an' 'arf yer time knee-deep in shell-'oles. No bon for mine, chum."

So spake one of the R.F.A. when we had informed him about our departure next morning. Not in the least bit daunted by such a prospect, we sallied forth again; and, after purchasing some fancy cards from the only French shop opened since the Hun bombardment, a number of us tried some of the poison sold to soldiers at a dilapidated *estaminet* across the street. We had asked for *vin blanc*. And we drank

the fearful liquid out of jagged-edged preserved-fruit tins. A friendly Jock, whom one of our number had invited to have a drink, advised us to go to the cinema hall and see the show that was on there.

"It's a bonny turrrn-out," said the kilted one. "An' it's yer ain laddies wot's gi'en it, ye ken. The Anzac Coves. Have ye no' heard uv thim ? "

No ; we had not. But we went to the "second-house" and were delighted with the performance our countrymen put across to the mass of khaki squeezed into the large, patched-up building. I have often paid five shillings to hear a much inferior entertainment than was given to us at the cost of half a franc admission.

CHAPTER XXXI

MARCHING TO PERTH CAMP

TO the quiet dweller at home it would perhaps seem strange that we could display genuine keenness at the prospect of getting into touch with active war conditions. There were three motives which would appear to account for our high spirits as we tramped out upon the Montauban road next morning.

Probably strongest of all was the desire to satisfy our curiosity as to the effect upon us of "dinkum" active service, what it was like and what novelties it might afford. Then, with every mile we marched from now on, so the more fully would we be able to look upon ourselves as men who had seen war from the inside. And looming up behind these more superficial motives was the feeling that by getting on with our job we would at least be doing our bit to help Australia and the Mother Country. It was really a deep sense of loyalty to Australia and pride in everything connected with the Commonwealth that was the inspiration of every man to get in and do his bit without flinching. Love of country, one could call it, and this deep-rooted influence

had become solidified the more our boys saw of the world and thus realized by comparison the great value of Australia to them.

The prospect of being maimed, or even killed, apparently had no terrors for our fellows. Their philosophy was simple and direct. Should they go "out" to it—well, others had done so, and it was all in the game—they would just be "unlucky"; and if, on the other hand, they lost a leg or an arm, the personal inconvenience of such would have to be borne, and they'd know that it was done in a pretty good cause. Besides, if Fritz could stand it, they'd take damn good care that they would. To hell with the dirty Boche! Any Aussey was as good as four square-heads.

So they argued during a halt for Smoke-o on the top of a hill an hour or so after we had set out on the metalled road. For even this bit of a march had brought us more into touch with war conditions than we had been before, and in doing so had influenced some of the noisy ones to chaff their mates about the likelihood of a fatal termination at no distant date.

"We'll all be pushin' up daisies this time next week," one optimist observed cheerfully. "An' I did so want ter see Paris before peggin' out."

"Paris!" snorted another. "Ye'll be wantin' roses on yer grave, next. Sparemedays! 'Ere's a bloke come over ter give 'is life fer 'is country talkin' about wantin' ter see Paris. An' tha 'ottest thing 'e did in London was ter word an' 'ospital sister about where 'e'd git a bus fer the Strand."

"*You'll* never see London again, anyway, Bill,"

remarked a fair-haired corporal, addressing the last speaker. "There's a big six-inch shell coming up to Fritz's batteries to-day, from his supply column, that has your number on the nose-cap. Poor old Bill."

"Cheerful lot uv blankers, youse!" exclaimed Long'n, who had sauntered up from where he had been examining an old rusty shell-case. "Is it this pleasin' an' lively scene that's makin' yer all feel like blokes just goin' on their weddin'-trips? Sparemedays, I think yer bluffin', yer blankers." He looked fiercely at the group of grinning men and then waved his arm to indicate the surrounding landscape. "Wot's wrong with this?" he demanded. "'Ere yev got hills an' bits uv hollers, an' more hills an' hollers, all decorated with old trenches an' shell-'oles, an' by way of variety lots uv things lyin' about—rusty barb-wire, broken shovels, bits uv waggons an' broken duck-walks an' ole shell-cases, an' that. An' ter make it more interestin' there's lots uv ole chalk parapets stickin' up everywhere like old graves, an' a few acres uv torn dead tree-stumps. Some one talkin' about London an' Paris! Gordstruth, this'll do me ter be buried in. Who says they can 'ead 'em?"

He broke off abruptly, his fingers balancing a couple of pennies on a much-used "kip." His challenge to speculate in the national game was quickly accepted, and in a very few minutes quite a knot of men had gathered to try their luck with the coins.

"All set 'n away she goes—a fair spin an' a good 'un; an' it's—'eads."

Long'n's penetrating voice rose above the cries of speculators :

"Two francs 'e 'eads 'em—any part of five francs heads."

And we wondered if our fellows had any care in the world or what it was that made them so unconcerned about the future.

Moving up between a few piles of bricks and war refuse—all that was left of the village called Montauban—an hour later, the unit once more sat itself down for a rest upon the highway. For it was solid work marching with every bit of your complete kit hung about your person ; the average weight of each man's arms, equipment, and ammunition must have exceeded one hundred pounds. And unless your "harness" fitted perfectly, there was always a buckle sticking into your back or a brace strap cutting your shoulder beyond endurance. Anyhow, we had not much farther to go, said the guide, before reaching some huts called Perth Camp, where we would sleep for one night and finish our march to the battalion next day.

All about us were old battle-fields. For miles the scene was nothing but a series of slight hills and hollows, pock-marked everywhere by thousands and thousands of shell-holes, and not a green leaf or blade of grass visible in all the desolate waste. As your eye became practised in observing the more intimate details, it was possible to discern where the "lines of resistance" had been, when this area had secreted its thousands of men on either side of No Man's Land. Interwoven among the shell-holes were systems of trenches, with the white chalk of

their parapets showing up in irregular blobs where the destructive barrages had failed to reduce them, or had preceded their formation. How armies could live in such a waste during mid-winter, with death for anyone whose head showed above ground, we could not even imagine.

And yet our fellow-countrymen had held part of the line hereabouts and were familiar with every phase of trench warfare as it was practised on this front.

The guide who had conducted the reinforcement from Albert, and who was to be our courier until the unit should reach brigade headquarters, was a very obliging Australian, and he took an interest in pointing out everything worth seeing, much to our satisfaction. Said he'd been out since Pozières and knew the Somme like he knew the Peel River district.

"I was born in Tamworth, in New South," he said when I asked him what part of Aussie he came from. "Was blacksmithin' fer a bloke in Peel Street and came away with one uv the early reinforcements for the Fifth Divvie."

"And how do you like this, after civvie life?" I inquired.

"Like it? Gord, I've got that used to it, an' it seems so lorn'g since I left me civvie job—this war's a b——!" He ended his sentence with a mirthless laugh.

"Tell us about all this, an' what stunts the Ausseys did in this region," a sergeant inquired, motioning with his hand to include the dismal scene around us. "You held the line here, didn't you?"

The guide removed a battered steel hat from his head and seated himself upon the brim, with the crown underneath.

"Yes, we held the line about 'ere," he replied. "It was a rotten cop. Mud up ter yer knees all the time mostly, an' nothin' doin' in the day-time. But at night, there was patrols out in front, an' ration parties an' that bringin' up tucker from the rear, slippin' an' slidin' an' cursin'; Gord, it was great; an' wirin' parties out in front, fixin' up where gaps 'ad bin cut by Fritz's stuff, an' yer'd 'ave tha 'Un rattlin' at yer with 'is ole machine-guns if yer makes the least noise. An' tha whole front could be spotted at night. Nothin' but star-shells an' flares goin' up from both sides all the way along."

He paused to light a cigarette, and then extended his finger in the direction of Bapaume.

"Yer can jist see some ruins in that gully away over there—that's Flers. Our blokes hopped over an' took it a few months ago. On yer extreme right—all them pointed sticks an' tree trunks—that's High Wood. Doesn't look much like a wood, does it? And there's been some great scrappin' around there. It isn't long ago that the British batteries was there, all kinds uv guns, an' at night ye'd see their flashes—never stopped fer hours—pastin' Fritz. In the day-time yer couldn't see them. Down a mile from 'ere, a bit to yer left, is Delville Wood. Where we camp to-night's on the edge of it. 'Struth, it is a battle-ground. Was won an' lorst about sixteen times before Fritz was pushed back. Yer'll see it ter-morrer. Away

there at the back, coverin' part uv that ridge, is Memetz Wood. That's where the Jocks an' others 'ad a lot uv fightin'."

"What are all those different clusters of red huts for—they seem to be dotted about all over the show?" some one asked.

"They're where the different mobs camp fer a night or two when they're goin' up or comin' back from the line. Even now there's lots uv Tommy battalions camped around 'ere."

"And how far is the actual front line from here, then?"

The guide scratched his head for a moment before replying.

"Let's see, it's fourteen kill-o's from 'ere ter Bapaume, an' Fritz 'as some posts about eleven kill-o's past that agin—that 'ud be twenty-five kill-o's—about sixteen mile. Yer kin 'ear our guns quite easy when tha wind's blowin' this way."

"How far back does Fritz put his shells now—I mean on this front?" inquired a young lance-jack casually. "When would we be likely to experience——"

Our war-soaked man from Tamworth winked at us slyly, but answered the question with the sincerity due to a mind groping for solid facts.

"'E pastes Bapaume every day, corporal. Always uses big stuff too. Tryin' ter disorganize the traffic so's we can't get on with our job. Never farther back, though. Yer'll strike it ter-morrer evenin', when yer goin' through tha town."

"And what does he get for it all?" from one of the sergeants.

"Jist keeps yer wonderin', sarge," answered the guide. "Though pretty often lately 'e's bin landin' them about tha railway station, an' when 'e does that 'e gits some donks an' limbers, an' now an' then some of the blokes workin' about."

"So that there's really nothin' to it till yer close up to tha line?" demanded Long'n, who was sitting on his pack near the guide.

"No," replied that worthy, "it's nothin', nothin' at all, digger. But youse blokes'll go right up ter yer battalion ter-morrer night, an' p'r'aps the nex' day yer'll be goin' inter tha line. Then yer'll know more'n yer do now about Fritz's shells."

After this interesting piece of information we formed up to resume our march, the leading fours as they adjusted their equipment joking with each other about their inclination to stop where they were or else go back home to Aussie.

"A man ain't safe—sparemedays 'e ain't!" exclaimed Hungry, deftly slinging his rifle over his right shoulder. "I wouldn't a' come if I'd known, fair dinkum!"

Our route led along the Montauban-Bapaume road for half a mile and then turned off to the left, down a sunken road the metal surface of which was here and there broken and patched by facine-bundles thrown in among the sticky yellow clay. Moving down a valley we could see the main railway-line to Bapaume, with a light railway running parallel to it along the valley ahead. Groups of men from labour battalions were scattered about, some working on road repairs and others "cleaning up" the debris and material still left about among the shell-

holes. Here and there in the right bank of the road we were on were several dug-outs—at least we could see the narrow openings and steep wooden steps leading down into them. Above, among torn tree-stumps and a confusion of broken stakes and barb-wire, were the inevitable trenches, battered and neglected, and sticking up out of the mud of them were old boots, broken rifles, bits of old uniform, and many other articles which are all a part of trench warfare.

Down the road a little farther and we turned off half-left on to a greasy, slippery duck-walk, and proceeded along it in Indian file for half a mile until we came to the cluster of huts known as Perth Camp. This, then, was to be our halting-place, and so the unit waited until an officer and a sergeant came out and proceeded to detail our huts to us and to explain about the drawing of rations. An hour later we were sitting around braziers in the huts, consuming hot tea and warmed-up Machonachie; and thoroughly satisfied with the progress of events right up to date.

If one could temporarily obliterate from one's mind everything connected with the period between enlistment in Australia and one's arrival on the edge of Delville Wood, what a contrast would be presented to the individual whose every faculty returned on being thrust into that blood-soaked area.

Instead of looking upon broad acres of ripening wheat, with the horses near by lazily swishing their tails to ward off the flies, and the dogs stretched out in the shade of last year's hay-stacks, or if on the coast, an intense blue sea showing between the

foliage of magnolia and pine lining the garden, and the warm Southern sun bringing visions of iced lemonade from a crystal jug in the airy dining-room—alas, where is this—what manner of place is this about me now?

I find myself sitting on an old parapet. A wild glance around reveals a pitiful and barren waste of churned-up earth, with no sign of vegetation anywhere. The sky is black and threatening, and an icy wind chills me to the bone. Immediately to my rear is an old trench, traces of which are visible for some distance to right and left, but hundreds of holes in the earth—holes five feet across and three feet deep, and half full of slimy green water—have interfered with the definite trench line and rendered it casual and disagreeable in its broken weakness.

Half buried in the mud round about are portions of rusty barbed wire, iron rods, broken rifles, shovels, sand-bags, bits of harness and old uniform. In a large hole close to me are the bodies of two mules, their sides gashed open and their eyes dulled with the death that has overtaken them this long time. Sticking up out of a chalky bank behind me is the booted and trousered leg of a human being, weather-worn and rigid as the old wheel-spoke that projects near it. Farther along, in the trench bottom, are portions of a human body, the ragged and muddy clothes still adhering to the flesh, and the head half buried in a filthy green pool. I climb down and examine one of the dull metal buttons on the tunic. It is that of a British Tommy. Near these gruesome relics are the remnants of old bandoliers, a steel hat, and a mess-tin.

Away to the North I can hear thunder—or is it the rumbling of big guns? So I stand and stretch myself and look farther afield. But it is the same thing everywhere—the same utter desolation and evidence of violent destructiveness.

CHAPTER XXXII

SOUVENIRS. DELVILLE WOOD. BAPAUME. OUR FIRST SHELL

WE heard our first sound of gun-fire soon after tea—a sustained and muffled growling like thunder, away over the horizon. Also we saw for the first time in France a number of aeroplanes on a 'flight. They were very high up and evidently returning to roost after a period over the German lines. But we craned our necks with interest and watched them until they were lost to sight in some distant clouds.

The presence of a cold wind blowing across the region of shell-holes did not deter most of the men from venturing forth after our meal, to explore the surrounding country.

"We're goin' ter look fer souvenirs," one of them announced sheepishly. "I'll get yer a German button fer yer belt, sergeant-major."

A little while later the remainder of us were impromptu hosts to a number of Tommies who strolled over from a camp close by, "for a bit of a chat," they said, but in reality to buzz some cigarettes from us, since they had none themselves.

So we let them smoke our fags and listened to their yarns about the awful winter that had just passed.

It was while an animated discussion was in progress between our boys and the visitors that I was struck by the remarkable characteristics of the Australian as an individual. There was no mistaking him, no matter where he might be. It was his face which was so distinctly a type of its own, and I have since been even more impressed with this peculiarity. There was a hardness about it. In the shape of the profile, the expression in the eye, there was a look of purpose—a bright determination that was either hardened by sternness or mellowed by an amiable disposition. It is almost indescribable—the Aussey face, and yet I have repeatedly picked out the Australians from a thousand hospital patients, all hatless and clad in hospital blue. As strong a characteristic as his face is the speech of the Billjim. This you can seldom mistake for that of any other human being, because it possesses its own distinct twang, which is a mixture of Cockney, Scotch, Irish, and good English. The Australian invariably pronounces “every”—“ever-e,” and “tea”—“toea.” But it is his wonderful use of slang that proclaims him a man from “down under,” a slang that is unmistakably Australian just as American slang belongs to no other country but that of Uncle Sam.

In the midst of an Anglo-Australian debate on the subject of French girls, about which our fellows knew very little, the souvenir-hunters returned to our hut and crowded noisily round the brazier in a shivering group. Some of them had worked

up a remarkable enthusiasm concerning war curiosities, and proudly displayed to us a few old nose-caps and other relics of bygone battles, which action brought forth smiles of amusement from the mud-stained Englishmen, who could not refrain from chaffing the new-comers about the greenness of their action.

"New hands nearly always be doin' that," one of the Englishmen observed. "Not only you Orstralian but others too; and the tame old things they pounce on. The only souvenir I want is my ticket. Never mind about anything else, blokes."

"I got some pretty good things," announced one of the Billjims, as he produced from his pockets a miscellaneous collection of odds and ends. "'Ad ter come back an' get me entrenchin'-tool ter dig fer them."

"Yes, the cold-blooded blanker," said his cobber. "We found a lot of dead Fritzes almost buried in some old trenches, and so this bloke decides to dig them out. And gee, didn't they hum! I left him to it."

"O' course yer did. One 'ud think yer was brought up in a bank or somethin', yer that fussy," replied the first speaker. "Wot's dead Germans, anyway? It'll do me ter dig them up fer things like these," and he displayed some old coins and various buttons abstracted from the clothes of the dead bodies.

"You'd pinch the gold teeth from a corpse, you would," his mate rejoined. "Never saw such a bloke. I'm not used to having for a cobber a coot

who's got no consideration for the dead." He turned to his pal in mock annoyance. "You're a pinching, thieving blanker."

"Oh, am I? Yer bin readin' my letters, yer miserable dag uv a bloke. An' anyway, yer dorg's a b——"

So the two friends continued to "chip" at each other with the utmost good-nature, as is the way of all Australian soldiers, and in doing so afforded amusement to an indulgent circle of listeners.

After our visitors had departed, and while the men were arranging their "beds" with a view to turning in for the night, those who had been out on the foraging expedition enlivened us with accounts of what they had seen.

"There's hundreds of blokes—ours an' Fritzes—that ain't buried properly," one man informed us. "You'll see them ter-morrer, lyin' about in old trenches oney half a mile from here. Gord! that ground must 'ave seen some scrappin'. We've no idea what our coves 'ad ter go through holdin' an' defendin' this part of the front, and in mid-winter, too."

"It makes yer think—if yer built that way," said another. "An' all those blokes lyin' out there 'ave got mothers an' sisters, I s'pose."

"Oh, cheese it, yer pore sloppy dope," yelled Hungry from a far corner, saving the situation at a critical moment. "This is war, yer know. It ain't no picnic, digger." He addressed the hut in general. "Any blokes feel like 'avin' a game of 'arf-franc rises?"

A requisite number assenting to his proposal,

they spread a blanket on the floor and started to play in the uncertain light of two flickering candles stuck on to empty benzine tins.

"We'll open with a jack-pot," said Hungry, dealing out six hands from a well-used deck, "and pay the usual royalties."

As the players scanned their cards, with the fitful gleam of the candles reflected upon their faces, the scene was one calculated to astonish and interest many a mild student of the psychological. He would reason that here were half a dozen men calmly playing for money who would to-morrow go up into an inferno where life was of no account, and who might never see more than one sun-set.

But isn't that the way of most men who are imbued with a true Anglo-Saxon spirit? And of course it takes such a war as this to bring out all these qualities hitherto undreamt of in our present generation.

Even now, when we were on the eve of a day that might prove fatal to many of us, there was no grave anxiety concerning the ultimate issue. The fellows jested and joked in the same old way as when we first embarked for England, and everybody felt light-hearted, though with some this gayness was more pronounced because of an underlying excitement at the prospect of to-morrow or the next day. And the secret of it all was the wonderful *esprit de corps*—a sense of true comradeship—that possessed us. We were a body of men ready, even eager, to fight, and each man knew that his comrades were trained, resourceful, and determined to go through hell if need be to beat the quotas of

grey-clad square-heads who might be pitted against them. Therefore, with our unassailable comradeship was the confidence in men with whom we had lived for the last eight or nine months. But even that could not save a man from high-explosive shells. Still, there was the philosophy of the Australian to annul any doubts arising from this latter source. And, anyway, we would be to some extent excited once into a scrap, and one would have no time to worry about mere physical danger. "Kill the Hun and get your objective" would be our motto.

I had reached this stage in my reflections concerning our fellows just as one of the two candles had burnt itself out, and, as I turned over under my blanket and great-coat to woo sweet slumber, the voice of Hungry reached me, a voice subdued out of consideration for the sleeping forms. "Come on, deal up the — cards. Let's 'ave an ace-pot for the finish an' then turn in fer some shut-eye. I'm sittin' stiff as a crutch. Wot you won, Lorng'n?"

Early next morning we were on the move again. The unit had to tail out in Indian file in order to keep to the duck-boards, a single track of which led away across the wastes of Delville Wood and was lost to sight over a far rise. On either side of the duck-wall and everywhere one looked it was nothing but old shell-holes and deep mud.

After an hour's walking, and with many a spill caused through a too greasy section of criss-cross boarding, the leading men halted to allow those in rear to make up lost ground. Then on again.

By such spasmodic methods we covered about two miles in one and a half hours, and then halted for a well-earned spell quite close to some old rusty tanks which had been abandoned some months previously. Of course we closely inspected these iron monsters, and noted how most of them had been put out of action by a direct hit from a small shell. Beyond them lay the remains of an aeroplane which had crashed—another relic of war's most modern machinery. There were several small cemeteries about this locality, each with its hundreds of little wooden crosses. A great number of these crosses bore the inscription: "An Unknown British Soldier."

Resuming our march once more, after traversing another mile, the duck-board track gave place to the most unprepossessing trail it has ever been my lot to experience. Our way now led over a sea of dark, evil-smelling mud, into which one sank half-way up to the knees at every step. This was really nothing but an area of big shell-holes, each one indistinguishable from the rest because of the impossibility of finding a yard of ground which had not been churned up by exploding shells. It was useless to try and pick your way, and great care was required to prevent you from slipping lengthwise into one of the many pools of green water which surrounded us on all sides. And, to make matters worse, our packs and equipment by this time had become so heavy that to carry them was a positive ordeal. The sense of humour possessed by some of us was the mainstay of that portion of the march. You forget your own troubles when every minute you

are seeing some other fellow slip and fall sideways into a loathsome morass and can watch his features as he drags himself out, muttering evil things against the Kaiser and all of his kind. Our unrestrained laughter, however, soon transformed full-throated blasphemy into reciprocal merriment, and men would crawl out from their undignified positions, cursing volubly, only to yell with delight the very next moment as some other unfortunate lost his footing and sat down suddenly in a great pool of mud and water.

By the time we had reached the next ridge after crossing Delville Wood, every man of the unit was mud to the waist and elbows, and our equipment and rifles were coated and re-coated with the sticky mess. And, although it was very cold weather, the perspiration simply streamed from us on account of our exertions.

During a spell and Smoke-o on the ridge we could see the country for miles around. Everywhere one looked it was the same forbidding desolation of pock-marked earth, with here and there the remains of woods, now only distinguishable by a conglomeration of blasted and jagged dead tree-stumps, from which protruded bare torn bits of limbs like supplicating arms. All semblance of trenches in most of these more forward areas had been obliterated by continuous pounding of the earth with large shells.

In all the world you could hardly find a more desolate spot than our immediate surroundings. The next stage, before reaching a metalled road, was not quite so hard going, but even here we

passed two pairs of mules with their limbers, all bogged deep in the mire and their Australian drivers cursing loudly as they proceeded to jamb cartridges into their rifles as the only way of saving the poor brutes from a lingering death. Once an animal gets properly bogged on the Somme Valley, seldom can it be extricated from its pitiful position.

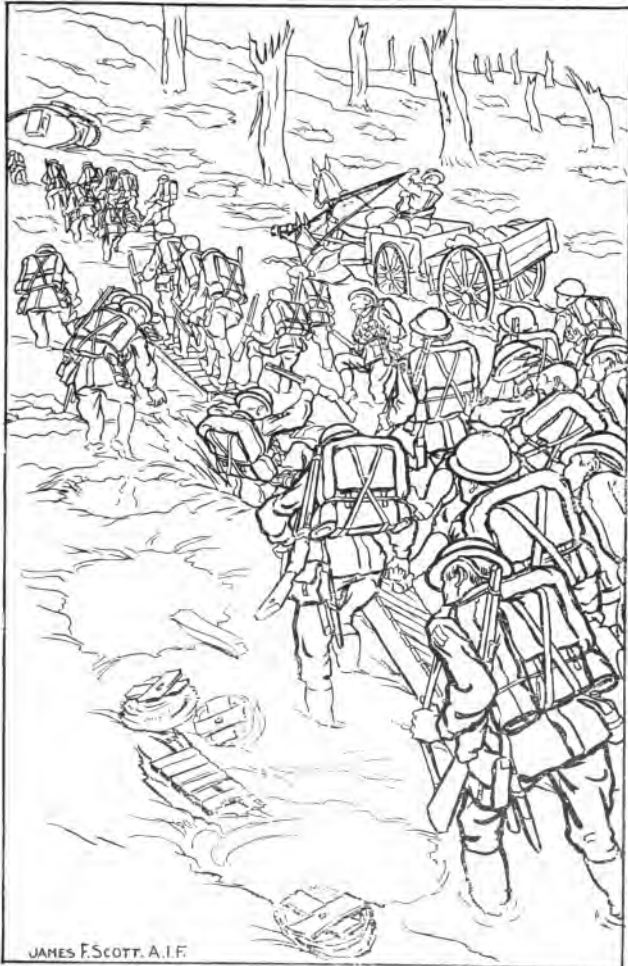
We had lunch and a smoke as soon as the metalled road was reached, the former assisting, to relieve us of portion of the twenty-four hours' rations which each man was carrying. Also we scraped a lot of mud off our exteriors with the handy jack-knife.

It was a very bedraggled and tired little column that formed up in fours when the journey was resumed soon after midday. As the road unwound before us, so did we begin to see signs of activity. The guide explained that the area we were now passing through had been held by Australian troops for some time prior to the Hun evacuation, and that the parties we could see working and the transport on the road were details of Australian Engineers left to "clean up" after the recent forward movement.

It was three in the afternoon before we caught our first glimpse of Bapaume—a few roofless and battered houses on the outskirts; and, although everybody felt dog-tired, there was a noticeable brightening up of the pace now that our goal was in sight. In addition to this, we heard the noise of heavy guns away ahead, and British aeroplanes were visible at several points in the sky.

Wearied and footsore, we trudged into the town and

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA



THE MARCH ACROSS DELVILLE WOOD

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became almost swallowed up in the great crush of transport and vehicles which moved along the different streets. Albert, we had thought, was a pretty good specimen of a ruined town, but Bapaume was the last thing in ruined buildings. The Boche had used explosives to blow out the walls, and by a systematic process had rendered every structure into a mere skeleton.

Trudging—rather dragging—along the vile cobbled highway in the centre of this busy rendezvous for troops, we at length halted in front of what had only a week before been the splendid Town Hall—now utterly wrecked by Hun mines exploded after the evacuation. An Australian staff officer came out and held converse with our officer, and the boys, anticipating a welcome termination to their march within the next few minutes, sank back painfully upon their packs and pictured the joy it would be to rid themselves of their tiresome trappings and get some ease for limbs and muscles aching with the strain of intense fatigue.

Those of us at the head of the column heard every word uttered by the staff officer.

“ Captain —, isn’t it? That’s right. All your men here? ”

“ Yes,” replied our leader, “ and almost done to a man. We’ve had a hell of a——”

The other cut him short. “ Yes, yes, I’m sorry—it’s a beastly march—but you’re to go on. The battalion is holding strong posts and small lines of trenches just beyond the village of M——, and close up to Fritz. They’re not too strong, and it’s rumoured the Boche will come over and try to re-

capture the village at any moment. So my instructions are to send you all on to the battalion at once. But before setting out, take the boys to the 'Comforts' place down the street, where they'll get some hot soup. I'll detail a new guide for you, who'll take you on to the battalion. Carry on—and good luck."

Fritz might come over! We were wanted! And almost immediately.

This wonderful news spread itself down the entire length of the column almost before the staff officer had disappeared, and if anything could have made the men temporarily forget their tiredness and the dead weight of their loads it was this fresh intelligence. Many of them arose from their sprawling positions to discuss the matter with "cobbers" farther along, and it was surprising to observe the fresh energy and agility they displayed. Here and there a query was put as to the distance we would have to march, and a number of the weaker ones, with a hazy idea that the continued journey would mean another six or seven miles at least, set their teeth and made a mental resolve to stick it out, no matter what physical suffering the extra mileage would entail. Hungry, immediately behind me, just about echoed the general opinion.

"'Struth, that's dinkum good news, sar'major," he said. "Excitin', too. We'll see some fightin' yet before it's all over. I reckon every bloke 'll be dead anxious ter git on an' see wot's doin'. But, sparemedays, it's hard on any Jills in our lot who's nea'ly done already, an' some uv them's bin walkin' like a dorg does on 'is hind legs, this larst

'arf-hour. The smell uv a Hun 'ud make me forgit I 'adn't oney just 'ad breakfast."

Inquiries from the guide elicited the information that battalion headquarters was about nine kilometres farther on, and that the road was in good condition. We decided to avoid recounting the distance to the men in rear, but our officer settled the question within the next minute.

"Now, boys," he said, addressing the entire reinforcement in his pleasant, low-pitched voice, "we've just received some very wonderful news. We're to go on and join battalion headquarters to-night, in case the Hun comes over to recapture a village the lads are holding. You fellows are expected by both brigade and battalion headquarters to cut in and stop Fritz if necessary. They're looking to you to reinforce your comrades. The distance to go on is roughly $5\frac{1}{2}$ to 6 miles, with a hard road-surface. Fall out any man who is too footsore to make the journey. Right! Since you all refuse to fall out, we'll go on in a minute and get some hot soup and a spell before continuing. I'm waiting for a new guide, and then we'll——"

But the good fellow's words were interrupted by a peculiar humming sound which suddenly broke out among the low clouds out to our left, to be followed almost immediately by a whistling noise that raced from a high crescendo down to an intense whine as a big shell nosed down on its angle of descent straight for our locality. The few seconds which preceded its arrival merely gave the fellows time to realize that a shell was in flight, and a sense of wonder, followed by an uncomfortable

nerve-tightening sensation, possessed them as the projectile tore down upon us in a hissing, rushing, hurricane of sound, and we all crouched with instant apprehension as its ominous crackling filled our ears. The next instant there was a terrific explosion to the right of us somewhere, and a mighty concussion, which bent us down even farther; and thus we stayed while there fell upon us fragments of earth, brick, and mortar.

"That blanker was close—just in tha next street." It was the guide speaking. "Musta got some blokes an' donks—an' 'ow did it shake even our possi? 'E does that now an' then just ter keep us reminded there's a war on. But dinkum, I thought it was comin' fair at us. Nea'ly 'ad the wind up that time."

"Right-o, lads." The O.C. laughed as he straightened and proceeded to light a cigarette. "We'd best push on and get some of that soup. All right, sergeant-major."

As we moved off, a new guide reported for duty and fell into step with the old one. Ten minutes later we halted in front of a dilapidated ruin which served as a soup kitchen and in a trice the men had their equipment off and were filing past the "window," each with a tin of steaming pea-soup in his possession. Though the tins were jagged-edged and had quite recently contained "*café au lait*" or "pork and beans," there was no doubt about the welcome reception afforded to the soup. It somehow put new life into us and added considerably to the enjoyment of fresh cigarettes when the "issue" had been fully consumed.

"That shell," remarked Long'n, as he stretched luxuriously on a tumbled heap of charred bricks, "dinkum, it 'ad me thinkin'. Sounded jus' like an express train comin' down a steep hill at sixty miles a second with all the steam-pipes blowin' off." He turned to Dags, who was trying to bolster up the lining of his steel lid so that it should fit more comfortably. "Did yer git that funny feelin' I 'ad—like as though somethin's drawin' the skin tight all over yer body? An' yet I was feelin' calm enough when it seemed a cert ter be comin' at us—if it got me, it got me, an' that was all."

"Yairs," Dags agreed, "that's right—oney I couldn't ever git used ter tha hiss'n' an' sputterin' of tha shell as it gits near yer. Orl right though when yer can tell it's goin' past yer."

"I don't wonder you blokes ain't keen on hearin' another of them things," remarked our first guide. "They're nine-inch gents, them. Gimme six Fritzes with rifles against me with me old rifle an' baynit—but big stuffs no bon—finney—na poo—alley toot-sweet fer a bloke." He lapsed into silence again.

Round us in twos and threes the boys were dwelling with enthusiasm upon the prospect of actual combat with men armed and trained like themselves—beings who would take definite shape—not unseen high-velocity shells which rent and maimed and could not be killed, and the great desire was to get on to this wonderful adventure and prove by deliberate action that Australian fighters with clean decisive methods were far more than a match for twice or three times the number

of square-headed, baby-killing, woman-slaying Hun savages. No lingering thought of death as their portion obtruded itself among the boys—or if it did there was no suggestion of such—merely the wonderful confidence which arises from knowledge of a just cause and the possession of material and training necessary to carry the business through. And hadn't these boys—many of them—faced appalling odds in their own country? Overwhelming and terrifying bush fires, personal combat with wild death-shod horses and stampeding cattle and the awful ravages of a prolonged drought? Glancing along the scattered groups, nearly all of whom were lolling about on either side of the street, a great wave of emotion filled me at the thought of how unconsciously gallant these fellows really were—what a magnificent spirit was theirs, and how truly they stood for courage, justice, and the democracy that only peaceful brotherhood can bring about.

It was while this influence was upon me that I first conceived the desire to portray these men and their kind in printed form, so that people who did not know them properly could get an insight into their real characters both before going into action and after they had experienced the terrible intimacy of close mortal combat. I should write something of them up to their first "hop over" against the ranks of militarism and oppression—since they themselves stood for true democracy—and a further account of them as they would live through all the joys, sorrows, and bitter experiences of a long strenuous campaign. This of course on the very

necessary condition that I survive the various "stunts" it should be my lot to experience.

While my thoughts were running in these channels, the voice of the old guide brought me back to affairs of the moment.

"You blokes," he was saying, "I don't like leavin' yer, yer know. But I'm timin' ter git back ter brigade headquarters just before the rum issue. Kin do with a drink out uv me old dixie." He stood up and stretched himself. "Hope I see yer all agin soon, diggers. I wish yer luck an' lots uv Blighties—so-long." And with a good-natured smile for everybody he sauntered off amid a chorus of jovial "Good-byes" and "Hooray, cobber, see you again," etc. Before getting out of earshot he turned and waved his hand to us, "Hope I meet yer on the boat fer Aussie—a bloke never knows 'is luck."

That, then, would be the sum and substance of everything—"a bloke never knows 'is luck"—that is, on active service.

With the old guide's departure, his successor confided to us something that had been told him by his colleague.

"'E says yer a bonzer lot—the best mob 'e's seen yet of any reinforcement," he related. "Reckons yer tha sorter blokes ter keep Fritz movin'. Gord blarmey, 'e's in love with yer—'e is, dinkum."

"That's cheerin', anyway, ain't it, major?" Long'n laughed with conscious pride.

"Yes," I answered, "it is. I've got a lot of confidence in this little bunch of fighters. You're

all looking forward to having a go at the Boche infantry, aren't you—no silent wish that you'd rather be at home now that we're close on to the real thing?"

A trace of laughter in my voice made several of the men grin.

"Yer ain't askin' that question dinkum, are yer, sergeant-major?" Long'n demanded, "'cause yer oughter know us blokes better."

"He's pullin' yer leg, yer lorng blanker," put in Hungry. "Yer'd be great in the Murrumbidgee if I was fishin' with big worms, yer'd bite every time."

"Oh, shut yer face an' give yer mouth a chance, yer hungry-gutted coot," returned Long'n, eyeing his cobber affectionately. "If I wasn't so blanky tired an' we 'adn't ter do another lorng march, I'd 'op yer out."

"Yer can 'op a Fritz out ter-morrer—yer so fond of inviting stouch," retaliated Hungry.

Their good-natured ragging was cut short by a curt order from the O.C.:

"Packs and equipment on, boys."

Five minutes later we were under way again.

CHAPTER XXXIII

GETTING INTO TOUCH

THE high road leading from Bapaume to Cambrai passes through quite a number of small French villages a mile or so apart, before it strikes the latter town, and for most of the way it has a hard surface and is lined on either side by a species of oak.

No sooner had the unit turned into this important thoroughfare and mixed with the dense stream of military traffic crowding its space in both directions, than the increasing drone of another big shell announced a fresh messenger of death from the far distant German gun which the Boche was using to try and hamper our organization. Somehow, through being wedged in between lines of G.S. waggons drawn by mules, and motor-vans full of shells, and with the presence all about us of philosophical drivers who, like the horses and "donks," exhibited not the faintest interest in the noise of an approaching shell, we experienced a much less uncomfortable feeling than formerly, as the crackling projectile burst in a heap of ruins well to our rear.

It is peculiar how the stoicism of men and beasts

will become infectious—or is it that an individual will restrain himself from exhibiting any trace of weakness or apprehension when he has all about him an example of supreme indifference? Surely we were not becoming “used” to shell-fire, and this only our second shell? Reflecting on the question as I marched along beside the new guide, I decided that it was a little of both, and the conscious belief that each of those shells was meant for the railway yards locality, and was therefore not likely to land anywhere within our particular vicinity.

It was beginning to get dark as we trudged on, and our equipment and stuff was weighing us down now like a double load. Oh, that we could throw our gear on to one of the many waggons and limbers moving up beside us, and get relief from the constant ache of cutting shoulder-straps and tightening belt! Besides, being forced well to the right of the road and marching two-deep, we generally found ourselves trailing through 8 or 9 inches of porridge-like mud scraped off the road surface; and transport waggons and swingle-bars would every now and then brush past us with not an inch to spare. As far as you could see in the gathering dusk the road was crammed with horse and motor traffic and small detachments of troops, like two never-ending processions constantly passing each other. This was a main line of communication to the “Bapaume Front.”

Half an hour of painful dragging and we had passed through the first village which spanned the highway. It was really nothing but a heap of tumbled-down bricks. Moving on beyond this and

with only the quarter-light of a few stars to guide us, we heard the commencement of an artillery duel between some British batteries some distance to our left and a battery of German guns away out somewhere in front. A sudden tongue of flame, followed by two or three more in quick succession, with the subsequent explosions. These were our guns. Fritz was replying with shells which burst fully a mile in front and therefore did not affect our feelings in the least, although we knew that possibly we would have to move on through that locality. On questioning the guide, he said that the Boche usually registered on a cross-roads three kilometres beyond us, about this time every night. He was after the transport, where it would have to make a detour round a big mine-crater in the centre of the main road.

"An' where's the joint we're ta camp in, digger?" inquired Long'n from the section behind me.

"Oh, battalion headquarters—that's five kilos from 'ere," replied the guide. "You'll probably 'ave ter sleep in some old ruins of houses there until the mornin', an' go up ter-morrer night."

"Five kilos—three and a third miles to go yet." And we were so weary already.

"All right, boys; fall out on the right of the road and nobody's to smoke. Get your gear off for a five minutes' spell—and remember, no lights."

The officer moved on to tell those in rear, and we stumbled to the road-side and let the loathsome pack and things fall off our aching bodies. What a relief to be free, if even for a few minutes, from those accursed gnawing straps.

It is peculiar how the human mind works. There we were, stretched out full-length in the mud by the road-side, aching in limb and muscle, and with our "innards" feeling that they hadn't received any food for a week, and yet there was that peculiar exhilaration of mind which possessed every man and triumphed over bodily aches and pains in such a way that we would have replaced our loads immediately, had orders been given, and gone on to the great experience that lay ahead, forgetting in our growing interest and excitement the hardships of the march.

Watching the endless flow of traffic: howitzer batteries, pack trains, ammunition columns, small detachments of infantry in file, all the multitudinous details of Army supplies, one could not help feeling the growing importance of one's position in the mighty panoply. *We* were now part of the scheme of things. *We*, like all these others, were accepted as strong fighting men, to play our particular part in the great business. Oh, well, we should not fail when the supreme test came, and there was not a man in the unit who did not feel "great" at the prospect and who didn't look forward to it with increasing impatience.

Even the suggestion of shell-fire had less misgivings than formerly, as we listened to the whistle and drone of two "big 'uns" overhead on their flight to Bapaume.

But how damnably heavy our equipment was when we swung it into place once more and moved off behind the officer.

A string of motor-ambulances passed us on their

way to a field dressing station in Bapaume. Looking back we could see the booted feet projecting from the end of each stretcher. Well, those men had tasted war and knew the grimness of it. Wonder if many of us—and how soon—— Further conjecture was prevented by a salvo of shots from a concealed battery of 18-pounders close to the main road, and on the outskirts of a village just ahead. The sound of the shells racing away filled us with pride and joy.

"That's it—stick it inter them—that's the stuff ter give 'em," muttered a man behind me, between breaths. "Kill the b——s."

In spite of a cold wind which swept across our line of march, the fellows' faces streamed perspiration as we left the second village behind and climbed a long slope towards the sound of enemy shells bursting just beyond it. Away out to the right and left small groups of field guns and howitzers disclosed their whereabouts by occasional V-shaped tongues of flame and a detonation that drowned the ever-present rumbling of waggon, the grinding of motor-engines, and the metallic ring of horse and mule shoes on the flinty road.

A feathery snow blew into our faces now, which brought forth blasphemous prophecies from a few men in my rear that we were in for a dirty night. However, it was something to grouse at, and no doubt saved us from dwelling on the methods of the Army, which made done-up infantry carry a load "like a blinkin' camel."

A bend in the highway half-way up the rise revealed the fact that beyond this point for some

distance the trees on either hand had been cut down and were lying just as they had fallen. Slightly beyond this we had to adopt single file in order to avoid a great mine-crater which had torn up the entire breadth of roadway, and round which temporary roads had been prepared to carry the constant traffic. If Fritz thought he could delay or disorganize transport arrangements by blowing huge craters 25 feet deep in the highway, he was much mistaken.

Topping the rise we fell out for another breather in time to prevent collapse by a few of the less robust of the men, who by now felt that nothing mattered, not even German shells. The spell served not only to recuperate our tired limbs but also enabled us to get some idea of where the British front line was situated. The guide pointed out its location.

"D'yer see those Very lights goin' up every now an' again?—that's it," he said. "Course it's in an' out like, an' there are parts of it with no troops ter speak of—mostly like that—strong posts, yer see. And there's several lines comin' back towards the rear. D'yer compree, Fritz left lines uv good trenches and bonzer entanglements stretchin' clean across the whole country hereabouts, and now we're usin' them or else diggin' fresh ones behind them for reserve troops an' that, since 'e'd have the ranges to all his old ones. But mostly our front line is the outskirts of villages an' small lines uv trenches 'ere an' there that we 'ad ter dig, ter link the line up a bit. Hallo, there's some Blighties fer some one—listen."

We listened. It was a renewal of the strafe on those cross-roads, which had lulled for a brief period. Six shells came, one after another, at regular intervals of half a minute, and we watched the glare of their bursting and heard the explosions with a sort of semi-detached interest, knowing them to be at least 500 yards in front and therefore harmless to us, and in any case we were too worn to bother very much.

"He must be usin' oney one gun fer that spot," remarked the guide. "They say 'e's pretty short of shells and that he's movin' all his artillery back by degrees to the Hindenburg Line."

Listening to the guide's calm voice, it occurred to me how intelligent the average Australian is in regard to war, and how quickly he learns to size up the general situation.

As I lay with closed eyes, wondering about many things, the voices of Hungry and Long'n engaged in quiet conversation close to me renewed my interest in the Australian as a type.

"Yes," Long'n was saying, "they an' dingoes are the cunnin'est things I ever seen. A fox when 'e wants ter 'ave young uns 'ill jump clear into a crop of standin' wheat an' 'ill make a twisty path right ter tha centre, an' there's no sign of where 'e went in, an' they an' dingoes will run round an' round in circles under a tree or wherever it is a hen or a turkey's perched, so's the bird will keep on watchin' them an' get giddy an' fall down."

"I once 'ad a half-tame fox an'——"

But Hungry's words were cut short by the rushing whine and sputter of a shell which pitched directly

on the road 60 yards in front of us and exploded among a mass of slowly-moving horses and men. Its sudden arrival and deafening report and the tremendous concussion of its forward blast smote us instantly flat to the ground, and we listened to the whizz of flying splinters, wondering if another was on the way and if it should get us before we had a chance to move from that unhealthy locality.

"Wonder how many poor devils that one got, and the poor nags?" Long'n whispered to me a moment later. The very next minute we heard a strong voice from the spot where the shell landed.

"Stretcher-bearers wanted—at the double—pass the word along quickly, men!"

"The dirty, bloody swine!" Long'n muttered, apostrophizing the gunners who had sent the shell.

Meanwhile our own officer had got to his feet and, beckoning to me, announced that we would move on into the field on the right and keep to it for some distance so as to avoid any more shells on the road.

"Split the men up into parties of fifteen or so, in file, with a 50 yards' distance between them, and keep that formation until further orders," he said. "Everybody all right?"

"Yes, sir."

So we divided up and wound out to the right, where we trudged on parallel to the road through a morass of recently ploughed ground intersected with new shell-holes. The "going" was awful here, great masses of earth clinging to our boots with every step, and men groaned with anguish at the further strain imposed on muscles that were already taxed beyond all ordinary limits.

"Don't lag, boys."

The officer's cheery voice drifted back to the rear-most men of the leading party who were beginning to string out. They set their teeth and made up the gaps, and thus we dragged on.

Fritz certainly paid marked attention to that particular cross-roads by the second mine-crater, and he was accurate too ; so accurate, in fact, that we could see the shells tearing great holes in the metallised surface and erupting tall black pillars of smoke, earth, and stones. But he was not getting anything else, except when a shot would go wide, or fall short and land in among the cavalcade that was using a hastily prepared road on either side of the crater.

Our little crowd was fully 150 yards out from the highway, and it is peculiar how we viewed the bursting shells with genuine indifference, and only when one seemed to be coming right at us and swished over our heads with apparently nothing to spare that we felt our flesh go "goosey" and bowed ourselves forward in anticipation of its bursting just beyond.

Once well past the cross-roads and the bombardment appeared to slacken, and by the time we had merged on to the road again it had ceased altogether, although a desultory fire was maintained by British guns away out on either side of us.

Just before we entered the outskirts of the next village, the light snow which had been falling increased to a genuine snow-storm, but the guide cheered us up considerably with the information that battalion headquarters was in the village,

which meant that our march would soon cease for one day, anyhow. Ten minutes later, with snow clinging to the rims of our tin hats and lodging on every portion of our gear which provided any sort of shelf, we drew up before a somewhat battered dwelling-house down a small side-street, and painfully let ourselves lie back upon our packs while the officer went in to report, as this was our destination. In a very few minutes he returned and motioned us to follow him, when we eventually found ourselves in a barn-like building that was considerably holey in places and which had recently housed cows or some other domestic animals, judging by the smell of the place.

Did we sleep well on the hard pebble floor that night, after absorbing a tot of rum each, some hot stew, and a dixie of hot tea? We did! And that is all there is to tell about our first night in France "with the battalion."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE REAL THING. FRITZ

“**E**VERY bloke was done to a turn larst night —not one of yer 'ad anythin' ter say, I noticed,” said Hungry, addressing the prone forms still under their blankets at nine o'clock next morning. Hungry was sitting up eyeing them in sardonic amusement while he reached for a cigarette out of his muddy tunic. “An' yer call yerselves soldiers.”

His somewhat harsh voice roused two or three into speech.

“You were such a marvel yerself, Hungry.”

“Had the wind up, digger, so you can't skite.”¹

Their voices awakened the remainder of the men, who one by one rubbed their eyes and sat up blinking like children disturbed in their sleep.

“Gord blarmey, I'm stiff!”

“What's the time, sergeant?”

“Who's got a cigarette ter give a bloke?”

Long'n's voice rose above the remainder. “Who said somethin' about 'avin' the wind up just now?”

¹ Boast.

he demanded. "Hop out the bloke that said it!"

"Garn, yer couldn't knock a fly off a dorg's face, Lorng'n," a man remarked.

Amid laughter and joking most of them proceeded to dress—put on boots and puttees, and wander out in search of a place where they could have a wash. It was only when they came back with clean, shiny faces, if somewhat bristly, that the conversation touched on last night's experiences.

"Will yer ever forget that march, George?" a big Billjim inquired of his cobber. "Thought I'd be gorne in the legs any minute—specially near the finish. Fancy blokes doin' what we done—Delville Wood an' that—an' the lorng tramp ter this joint—ter be sniped at with them burstin' shells just when yer comin' down the straight. And although every shell that come near me was ridin' me, whip an' spurs, I couldn't lower me record another fraction."

"Yes, we saw something last night," replied George. "I feel as if I was an old hand now. Lucky none of us were hit when that shell got those poor chaps and their donks just ahead of us. If we'd been standing up instead of sitting and lolling about——"

"Some of us blokes 'ud be well back beyond Bapaume with a nice little Blighty," interrupted Hungry.

"That ud be no good to a bloke." It was Dags, the shearer, who spoke. "Wot ud be the good uv gettin' a smack before yer've seen any real fightin'? Some coves might like ter stop one an' git back an'

kid every one they'd bin through a big scrap. I ain't that sort of a bird. I want to feel a Fritz on me bay'nit first."

"Same 'ere," responded several of the men.

"Which reminds me," said George, "I don't honestly think there's a single individual in this draft of ours who wouldn't jump at the chance of a dinkum scrap with twice or three times the number of Germans. Hope we can hop them out to-day."

George's words just about echoed the sentiments of every man in the reinforcement. While two orderlies were bringing our breakfast of fried bacon and tea, the various discussions which arose were all about the great march and how proud everybody was to think that we as a body had hung it out, and that we betrayed not the faintest nervousness when those shells had fallen so close. The boys were beginning to realize that each and every one was made of the right stuff, since we were practically all recruits when it came to the grim business of killing and being killed.

How soon they were to be put to the supreme test—blasting German shell-fire about them and waves of grey-coated German infantry bearing down on them—they little guessed; nor could they foresee what numbers of them would not be present to answer the roll-call that very evening.

After breakfast we cleaned our rifles, ammunition, and equipment thoroughly, and, leaving our packs and blankets in the billet, mustered for inspection by the colonel and adjutant. As we stood to attention, every man experienced a feeling of re-

joicing at the thought of our yesterday's test and how we had come out of it. And the colonel evidently had been informed of the day's experiences, for he nodded to us pleasantly as he proceeded to look us over.

"Men," he said, "I have received an excellent report from England about you, and a further excellent one from the officer who brought you up from Étapes. It seems you had a strenuous day yesterday—the total march with complete kit was roughly sixteen miles, over the worst route in France. And you've already come under your baptism of shell-fire. Throughout you've never wavered nor shown any signs of crumbling up. I like that! And in doing so you have but emulated the deeds of your countrymen here whose motto seems to be 'Stick it out.' This refers not only to fighting and route-marches."

After a few remarks relative to the disposition of our crowd among the various companies, and a word or two about standing orders, the C.O. went on with his speech.

"One last thing," he said, "some of you are no doubt still tired and could do with a rest. All right. You will have until 2 p.m. to spell, and then you'll go out to your respective companies in fighting order as ration parties, and carry on then in the ordinary way. The Boche may come over any day to try and recover the village, which we are holding by occupying a sunken road just beyond it, and we're commanding most of the ground in front with Lewis-gun posts thrown out. If he does make an attempt, I know that you will be keen to try your-

selves out and show the value which I'm placing on you. That is all."

That was all, but it was quite enough to put the finishing touches to our boys and make them completely forget their aches and pains in gratification at the prospect of stirring times ahead. To take rations to the companies and then carry on with them! Nothing could be better, and within a few hours too.

"Seems a good bloke, that," remarked Long'n, when we had returned to the barn after inspection. "Gives yer confidence ter go on an' that."

"'E's a fine bloke in tha line," said a headquarters signaller who had strolled in for a yarn with us. "Fritz don't worry him in the least, an' 'e gets round visitin' the different possies, an' takes no notice uv shells or typewriters snipin' at 'im. Do me when we're in, but 'e's a b—— once we get out fer a spell. Keeps yer workin' an' drillin' an' route-marchin' all —— day."

"An' wot sort uv officers 'ave yer got in the companies?" inquired Dags. "Good blokes?"

"Mostly," returned the sig. expert. "But there's one or two windy coves among the platoon commanders. Young blokes that ain't seen much service an' come over from Aussie with one pip up. Still, they ain't much trouble, 'coz the platoon sergeant really takes the platoon over an' the boys follow 'im, when there's anythin' doin'. The other bloke could stop in a dug-out drinkin' tots uv rum fer all they care, an' it's oney when there's maps an' compasses ter be used that those blokes 'ud ever be wanted."

"And the N.C.O.'s—how about them?" asked the fair-haired lance-corporal.

"Some's good—real good—an' others ain't up ter much, Snow," replied the signaller. "A bloke that yer'd think would be good in tha line sometimes ain't no good at all—gets the wind up easy or gits too excited, an' others wot seems they'd be up ter putty turn out real good blokes. Yer never can tell with some blokes. But nearly all could lead a platoon if it come to a pinch—an' there's lots uv privates could do that too, among our lot."

"What's the fighting been like lately, sig?" inquired a sergeant. "Any close work?"

"Nothin' much, sarge. Ole Fritz keeps on tryin' ter feel our possies at night with small patrols, an' they tried ter raid us two nights ago, but came a gutser, 'coz we hopped out an' met 'em, an' they put their 'ands up. Course his artillery 'as a go at us sometimes, but we ain't had many casualties lately."

"How far's our blokes from 'ere, mate?"

"Only about two kill-os, Dark; an' good cover all the way, 'coz the line's on top of a ridge. He's on top of another ridge about 500 yards beyond, with a dip in between. S'truth! Hear that? That's shrapnel. Let's 'ave a screw at where 'e's searchin'."

We trooped out with the signaller to some ground behind a hedge in rear of the barn, and, following his directions, saw a slowly-dissolving cloud of black smoke up in the air about half a mile away towards the ridge where our various companies were situated.

As we looked, several more black dots appeared

in the same place and spread themselves out fanwise, and we heard the hard, sharp cracking reports a moment later.

"He does that about four times a day," said the signaller. "But mostly his shellin's nothin'," he added cheerfully. "'Struth, ain't it cold to-day? This is a blanker of a place fer cold winds. Wouldn't like ter be up in one of them balloons yer can see. Too cold fer mine, spottin' in one of them things."

We glanced in the direction in which he pointed and could just make out a line of sausage-balloons strung out at long intervals away to the left.

"Those are ours, an' we gin'rally 'ave a couple more not far from 'ere on tha right. The blokes in those keep tab on Fritz's movements an' spot his artillery."

After lunching on hot stew, tea, and white bread, the reinforcement paraded for division into parties for each company and to receive final instructions before setting out on its initial trip to the "front line." Also all N.C.O.'s of the draft had to revert to the ranks on account of their being "acting" rank with a reinforcement. This latter development we had expected as we were aware of the regulations in regard to this, and the fact that we had to make up the fours as privates was no hardship, because the men we were soldiering with were such good fellows, and, although they ragged us here and there about our "downfall," their efforts were in reality directed to make us feel that we were doubly welcome in this new capacity and

that they were sorry the old conditions could not last.

"But you'll be a sergeant in no time, sergeant-major," said Long'n to me hopefully. "I ain't kiddin'."

Then came the issuing to each man of a few Mills grenades, already detonated and ready for use, after which we were dismissed to "sharpen our bayonets" on a couple of grindstones and hand in our packs and blankets to the Q.M.

"After getting the points nicely sharp," said the R.S.M., "you will be given rations to carry up to the different companies. There'll be N.C.O.'s from each company down to take you along."

It was on the stroke of three when the different parties set out. Each was led by a corporal from the company it was to reinforce, and we adopted a similar formation to that of the preceding night—two-deep with 50 to 100 yards between groups. The fellows wore their equipment with the haversack on the back, their pouches filled, spare bandoliers full of cartridges over each shoulder, and bombs in their pockets. Each man's rifle was slung over his shoulder, and he carried either a small bag of bread, an Army petrol-tin of water, or a jar of rum.

Miles away ahead in the clouds, like a tiny toy, we could see a German sausage-balloon, the basket of which was invisible by reason of the distance. To the left front a spasmodic gun-fire was audible, and well to our rear in the direction of Bapaume several of our planes were nosing through the low-lying cloud-banks.

Nothing much doing to-day, apparently. This must be part of the front referred to in the *communiqués* when they read, "On the remainder of the front all was quiet."

Our track led through a grassy field and half-way across an old stubble patch, when it turned off through a small grove of leafless trees and emerged out at the foot of the slope leading to the Australian positions 400 yards beyond. Two six-inch howitzer guns poked their short muzzles out between the branches in the grove, and their gunners nodded a cheery "Day, Ausseys," to us as we passed them and commenced to breast the slope, which boasted a carpet of short grass and numbers of new shell-craters.

Our rearmost party had barely left the grove to climb the hill when the first intimation of an other than quiet day was suggested to us. From far ahead a droning sound suddenly became audible, which increased in intensity every second, until with a spiteful, hissing, rushing whirlwind of noise a number of shells struck the rise before us and burst in great sprays of earth and stones and flying metal.

With the nearer approach of these amiable messengers we again experienced that peculiar tightening of the skin and slight sub-conscious elevation of the internal organs which occurs under close fire, and the wasp-like song of shell-splinters immediately afterwards was the signal for a relaxation of this objectionable practice—a sort of "all clear" signal we knew it to be.

"Five-nines." The corporal beside me bit the

words out quickly, his eyes scanning the crest of the rise, and his whole attention concentrated on what lay beyond. Suddenly he looked round and his right arm signalled a hurried "extend" to the parties in rear. Amid a confusion of whirlwind sound we heard him speaking to us again. "Double out with me and don't spread," and he was off to the left, our little group on his heels as a fresh salvo of shells whirled and fizzed down on us. They were slightly longer-pitched and more scattered, this second lot, and the nearest one to us bursting within a dozen yards flung us forward in instant apprehension of its too close proximity.

"On, boys."

Again we could hear the corporal's voice shouting beside us to make himself heard amid the din of shells exploding and more shells arriving, and we stumbled forward once more.

Beyond us, twenty yards away, was a piece of old trench with a substantial parapet of recently-filled sandbags, and guided by the N.C.O. we raced for its inviting cover just as several deafening reports crashed over our heads.

Izzzzz—phut—phut—izzzzz—. Splinters and shrapnel bullets whined angrily all round as we literally fell into the trench to escape their flying vengeance, and Long'n's steel hat rang sharply as a shrapnel bullet ricocheted off it and entered the ground near by with a dull "phut."

"Gord! Look, they've got some of our blokes." Hungry had straightened himself up and was looking back over the parados to see what the remainder of our fellows were doing. "The pore—" But his

voice was drowned in a terrific detonation almost beside the trench, which loosened half the wall in front and covered us in earth and falling stones.

"Keep well down, everybody! He's usin' whizz-bangs," commanded our leader; "an' gimme a cigarette, somebody."

There was certainly a period of extreme activity in our immediate area to judge by the noise all about. Shells of various calibres were arriving in droves and from our crouching positions we could not dare to view their exact landing-places, as nearly every one threatened to enter our protection—when its arrival happened to be announced. The whizz-bangs were not so considerate in this respect. They simply came with a sudden "b—zip" and then "bang," and if you were there—well, you weren't there the next instant. During the four to five minutes of intense strafe we "kept down," and I'm not departing from the truth in saying that on very many numerous occasions during that time we thought our end had come, as a shell would pitch right on the parapet or thereabouts and almost blind us with the violence of its yellow flame and nerve-racking forward blast only just over our heads.

Luckily nobody of our party received more than slight shocks during our trench-hugging manœuvres, and as less danger seemed imminent one by one we raised ourselves and peeped over the parapets and down the slope.

Fritz had scored, right enough.

What a peculiar unreal feeling a man experiences when he gazes for the very first time upon the huddled and torn bodies of friends he had joked

with scarce half an hour previously. I could hardly realize that the still and lifeless bodies plainly discernible on the edge of new shell-holes from which the last remnants of smoke were ascending had been my comrades such a short while ago. Other khaki-clad forms were moving, some crawling painfully and others with bleeding stumps instead of arms enduring an agony of twitching as they lay about trying to bring their dulled and scattered senses back to a reality of it all.

Muttering horrible blasphemies at these sights before us, a number of the boys beside me made as if to climb out of the trench and go to the poor things below, in spite of the five-nines and shrapnel which continued to search the slope. But the corporal motioned them back into the trench.

"We're going up—not down," he said savagely. "There's a barrage on up along the line and Fritz must be comin' over. We gotter be in that—come on." So we sprang out with him and on up the hill. "Fix yer bayonets as yer come," he added.

Next moment he had blown a whistle to attract the remnants of other parties of ours taking cover in shell-holes, and looking back we could see these men in twos and threes emerge from their concealment and steal forward toward the hill's crest, rifles at the trail.

But the front required all our attention. The German batteries had put down a creeping barrage between their position and ours, and as we neared the line of trench occupied by our battalion we could see the curtain of shells bursting only 200 yards in front of us, and steadily drawing nearer.

From the entire length of our trench line came the crackle of rifle-fire and the continuous rat-tat-tat of machine-guns, and behind the German barrage we could observe masses of figures in field-grey uniform crowding up behind the protection of bursting shells. The sight of those men coming towards our lines brought to us a feeling of the most intense exhilaration. At last we would be able to get even. Now we would have something definite to kill, instead of crouching in fear from the awful unfairness of German high-explosives. At last—— But one's thoughts cannot remain centred on one thing too long when British artillery come into play behind you. Our guns from all positions in rear had suddenly opened up on the advancing hordes of Boche infantry, and as we jumped into the trenches beside men whose rifles were hot with continuous rapid fire we saw huge black eruptions of smoke, earth and bodies in field-grey go hurtling up forty and fifty feet into the acrid air.

But our "stopping" barrage was beyond the first two lines of German infantry, who still came on behind a curtain of shells now much weaker and more patchy than hitherto. As they covered the ground yard by yard we sprayed them with bullets at point-blank range, and when the distance separating us was scarcely a hundred yards, with shells bursting round us on every side, the great moment came. An officer from our trench suddenly sounded a shrill blast on his whistle and with a rifle and fixed bayonet he leapt up on to the battered parapet with his bayonet point at the charge.

“Come on, Ausseys!” he yelled joyfully. “Come on, you loves, an’ stick ’em, you boshker boys!”

And like a wave gathering on a beach so did we up and over before he had quarter finished his sentence.

THE END

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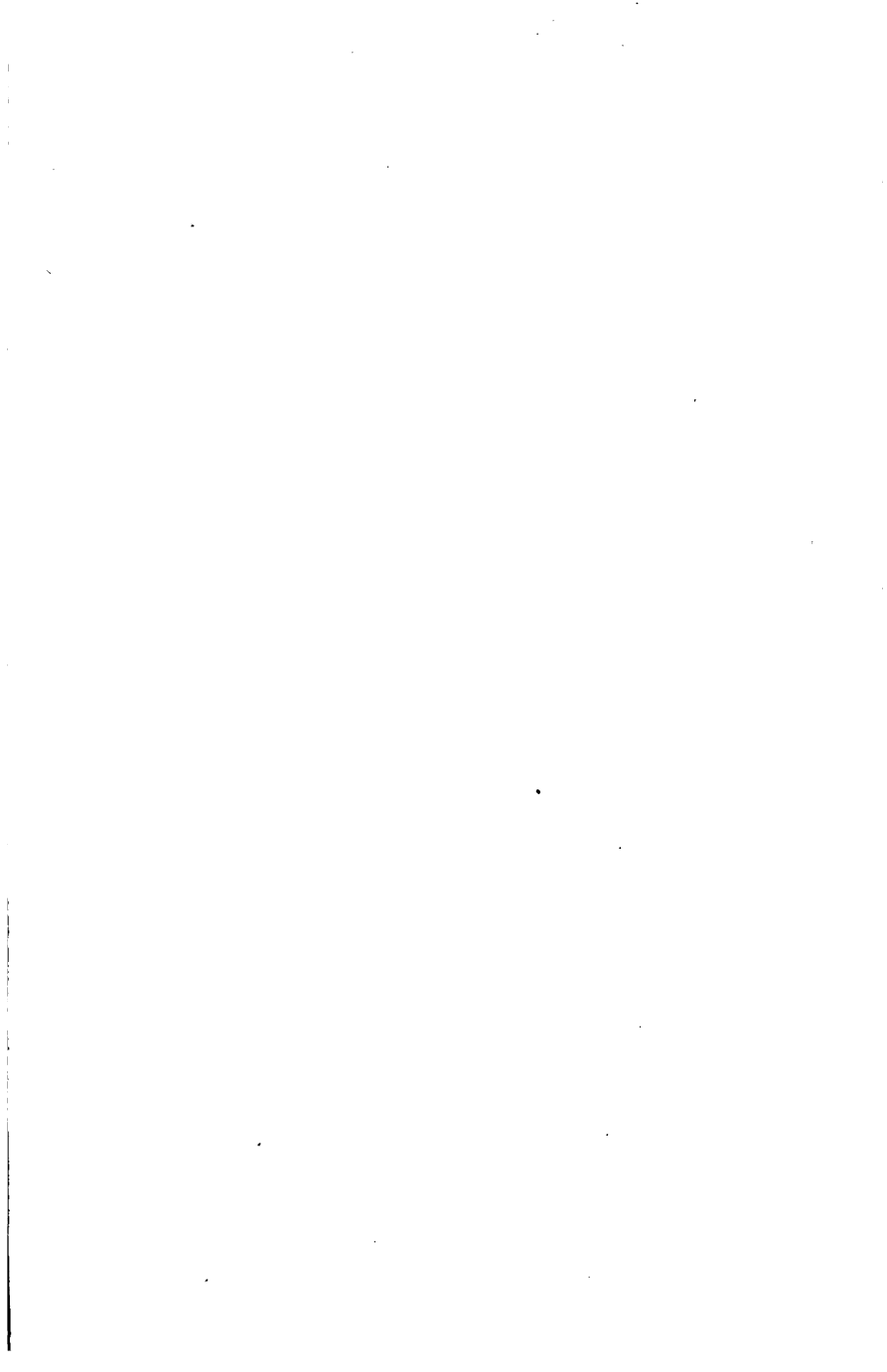
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